PARTISAN REVIEW

VOLUME XIV
1947

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EDITOR'S NOTE: "The Nest" and "Homage to Paul Klee" originally appeared in recent issues of the French literary review *Fontaine.*

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Writers and Madness

WILLIAM BARRETT

1. *The Ancients. The Power to Convince. Authenticity. Swift.*

Is my title extreme? It is, if you will, just the same subject that has been very much discussed recently under the titles "Art and Neurosis," "Art and Anxiety," etc. But I choose the more ancient and extreme term precisely to maintain continuity with all the older instances. Is anything born *ex nihilo,* much less a phenomenon so profound and disturbing as that estranged neurotic, the modern writer? Even when the poet existed in his most unalienated condition—in ancient Greece—the similarity of madness and inspiration was the common saying; and Plato did not invent but only gave literary formulation to the belief about the poet's madness. Pause for a moment over this extraordinary paradox. They sat on sacred ground, precinct of the god, the day and drama were surrounded by all the occasions and overtones of religion, the myth known and on the whole taken as true, and yet. . . . And yet this audience too must exact a terrible price of its poet before they can take him seriously. A secret guilt perhaps? As they sat in broad daylight indulging their collective fantasy, pretending to believe that what was before their eyes was in fact something else, did an uneasy stirring at this indulgence drive them to exact from their poet in revenge the penalty of madness-inspiration? But what, in any case, we do know is this: that even when dealing with myths whose form and details were completely laid down for him, the Greek poet had to launch out into this sea (of "madness," if we believe Plato) in order to return to pour his own personal being into the preformed mold. Otherwise, his play could not have convinced an audience that already assumed their myth as a matter of fact—such is the paradox from which we start!

Everything Swift wrote, Leslie Stephen says with penetrating good sense, is interesting because it is the man himself. (If this is true of many other writers, there is on the other hand a special and compelling sense in which it holds of Swift—another reason for my finding his case so apposite.) Does it look as if I were only about to say,

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with Buffon, "the style is the man"? But "style" does not say enough, and it is not enough to remain happy with the judicious aphorism or with Stephen's judicious critical observation. The modern critic cannot rest easy with this eighteenth-century piece of astuteness, which long ago passed into the stock of our critical assumptions; we begin to know too much and we must dig mines beneath its truth.

But it is well to begin from such broad and obvious data of criticism (instances of which we could multiply indefinitely) for we may now pass on to the more complex and really monumental example provided us by James Joyce. In his *Portrait of the Artist* Joyce develops a theory of literary creation, anchored on the metaphysics of St. Thomas but essentially expressing the Flaubertian view of the writer as a god who remains above and beyond his creation which he manipulates as he wills. But in *Finnegans Wake* the universal human symbol of the writer has now become the infant Earwicker twin scrawling with his own excrement on the floor! (Between the two, somewhere near the midpoint of this remarkable evolution, Stephen Dedalus declares, in the famous discussion of Shakespeare in *Ulysses,* that the writer, setting forth from his door for the encounter with experience, meets only himself on the doorstep.) If Joyce is the great case of a rigorous and logical development among modern writers, each step forward carrying the immense weight of his total commitment and concentration, we are not wrong then to find in this changing portrait of the artist a measure of how far he has matured as man and writer from the once youthful and arrogant aesthete. And if we will not learn from our own experience, do we not remain formalists toward literature only at the expense of neglecting Joyce's far deeper experience?

But in fact we already know there is no escape from ourselves. Existence is a dense plenum into which we are plunged, and every thought, wish, and fear is "overdetermined," coming to be under the infinite pressures within that plenum of all other thoughts, wishes, and fears. Fingerprints and footprints are our own, and Darwin has pointed out that our inner organs differ from person to person as much as our faces. The signature of ourselves is written over all our dreams like the criminal's fingerprints across his crime. The writer, no more than any other man, can hope to escape this inescapable density of particularity. But his difference is precisely that he does not merely submit but insists upon this as his fate. It is *his own* voice which he wishes to resound in the arena of the world. He knows that the work must be his, and to the degree that it is less than his,

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to the degree that he has not risked the maximum of his being in it, he has missed the main chance, his only chance. The scientist too may insist on the personal prerogative of discovery: he wants the new element, planet, or equation to bear his name; but if in this claim for prestige he responds to one of the deepest urges of the ego, it is only that this prestige itself may come to attend his person through the public world of other men; and it is not in the end his own being that is exhibited or his own voice that is heard in the learned report to the Academy.

So we have come quickly to the point, and may now let the categories of *authentic* and *unauthentic* out of the bag. I am not very happy about the terms, I wish we had better in English, but it should be clear from our instances so far that they are not really new notions, and that they do come forth now at the real pinch of the subject matter. If a certain amount of faddism has recently and regrettably become attached to their use, they have on the other hand also become obsessive for the modern mind—a recommendation which we, existing historically, cannot help finding a little persuasive. The Marxist will not fail to point out that a highly developed technology, which is not directed toward human ends but capable on the other hand of overrunning all areas of the social life, has plunged us into this civilization of the slick imitation, celluloid and cellophane, kitsch and chromium plating, in the morass of which we come inevitably to speak of "the real thing" and "the real right thing" with an almost religious fervor. And he will go on to explain then why the category of authenticity should play such a crucial role in modern existential thought. He would be right, of course, but he ought also to drop his bucket into the deeper waters of the well. One deeper fact is that modern man has lost the religious sanctions which had once surrounded his life at every moment with a recognizable test capable of telling him whether he was living "in the truth" or not; Hegel drew a map of the divided consciousness, and Freud explored it empirically beyond anything Hegel ever dreamed, showing us, among other things, that Venus is the goddess of lies; and so we come, as creatures of the divided and self-alienated consciousness, to wrestle with the problem of how we are to live truthfully. But if these categories have become historically inevitable, and we borrow their formulation from existentialist philosophers, we have on the other hand to insist that it is not these philosophers who can tell us, after all, how authenticity is to be achieved either in art or life. Freud, not Heidegger, holds the key. The mechanism by which any work of art becomes authentic—

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flooded in every nook and cranny with the personal being of the author—can only be revealed by the searchlight of psychoanalytic exploration.

How then is authenticity—this strange and central power of a fantasy to *convince* us—achieved? A first and principal point: it seems to involve a fairly complete, if temporary, identification with the objects of fantasy. The difference between Kafka and most of his imitators becomes a *crucial* instance here. When Kafka writes about a hero who has become an insect, about a mouse or an animal in a burrow, he is, during the course of the lucid hallucination which is his story, that insect, mouse, or animal; it is he himself who lives and moves through the passages and chambers of his burrow; while his imitators, even when they are fairly successful, strike us as simply using so much clever machinery borrowed from him and often more ingeniously baroque than his, but which lacks precisely that authenticity of identification. But this identification with the objects of fantasy is also in the direction of insanity; and perhaps this is just what the ancients knew: that the poet in inspiration ventures as close to that undrawn border as he can, for the closer he goes the more vitality he brings back with him. The game would seem to be to go as close as possible without crossing over.

Now imagine, for a moment, Swift in the modern pattern. After the downfall of the Harley ministry he retires to his wretched, dirty dog-hole and prison of Ireland, has a nervous breakdown, a crack-up, is patched together by several physicians and analysts, continues in circulation thereafter by drinking hard but spacing his liquor carefully, and dies at an earlier age of cirrhosis of the liver. Shall we call this: Living on the American Plan? It is the violence of the new world, after all, that has made a system of violent drinking. Now to be drunk and to go mad are both ways of overcoming the world. If in the interests of human economy we are left no choice but to prefer the American Pattern, would we not, however, feel a little cheated had Swift's actual history been different? Before the ravening gaze of his miserable species he flings down his madness as the gage of his commitment and passion, and it has now become an inseparable part of the greatness of the human figure that rises out of history toward us.

When Simon Dedalus Delany, amiable and easygoing, remarked of a mutual acquaintance that "He was a nice old gentleman," Swift retorted, "There is no such thing as a nice old gentleman; any man who had a body or mind worth a farthing would have burned them

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out long ago." Does not this become his own comment on his eventual madness? The man who retorted thus, it is clear, lived with his whole being flung continuously toward the future at the end of the long corridor of which was the placid if disordered chamber of madness. To have gone mad in a certain way might almost seem one mode of living authentically: one has perhaps looked at the world without illusion and with passion. Nothing permits us to separate this life from this writing: if the extraordinary images the biography provides us—the old man exclaiming, over and over again, "I am what I am," or sitting placidly for hours before his Bible open on Job's lament, "let the day perish wherein I was born,"—if these move us as symbols of a great human ruin, they are also the background against which we must read the last book of *Gulliver*. The game is to go as close as possible without crossing over: poor Gulliver the traveler has now slipped across the border into the country of the mad, but this journey itself was only a continuation of the Voyage among the Houyhnhnms. A moment comes and the desire to escape takes on a definite and terrible clothing, and the whole being is shaken by the convulsions of what we may call the totem urge—the wish to be an animal. Rat's foot, crow's skin, anything out of this human form! The Ainu dances and growls and is a bear, the Bororo Indians chatter and become parokeets; Swift wanted to be a horse, a beautiful and gentle animal —and probably nobler on the whole than most human beings. This is the madness already present in *Gulliver*.

We do not mean to deny all the other necessary qualities that are there: the once laughter-loving Dean, lover of *la bagatelle,* King of Triflers, the great eighteenth-century wit, the accomplished classicist. Precisely these things give Swift the great advantage over a writer like Céline, whose rage is, by comparison, choking and inarticulate—like a man spitting and snarling in our face and in the end only *about* himself, so that we are not always sure whether we are being moved by literature or by a mere document of some fearful human extremity. What for the moment I am calling "madness," the perhaps simpler thing the Greeks called "madness," must somehow flow freely along the paths where all men can admire. If it erupts like a dam bursting it only inundates and swamps the neighboring fields; conducted into more indirect and elaborate paths, it irrigates and flows almost hidden to the eye. The flow from the unconscious of writer to reader would seem, then, to be more effective precisely where the circuit is longer and less direct, and capable therefore of encompassing ampler territory in its sweep. Lucidity, logic, form, objec-

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tive dramatization, traditional style, taste—all these are channels into which the writer must let his anguish flow. And the denser his literary situation, the more he is surrounded by a compact and articulate tradition, the more chances he can take in casting himself adrift. But whatever Swift's advantages in literary and moral milieu, we cannot forget that he himself lived to write his own epitaph and in this final summing-up had the last word on the once laughter-loving Dean. And it is just his *saeva indignatio*—the mad wrath which, as he said to Delany, did "eat his flesh and consume his spirits"—that establishes the deeper authenticity of *Gulliver* which separates it from any other production of eighteenth-century wit. He himself as Gulliver towers over his Lilliputian enemies, and flees from the disgusting humans into the quiet stables of the horses. How far his madness had already taken him, he could scarcely have guessed, for it had unconsciously carried him, an unquestioning Christian, for the moment outside Christianity: the rational and tranquil Houyhnhnms do not need a Messiah's blood and an historically revealed religion in order to be saved, while the Yahoos could not possibly be redeemed by any savior. Swift might not have gone mad after writing *Gulliver,* but much of the power of that book comes from the fact that he was already on the road.

Once a writer imposes his greatness on us he imposes his figure totally, and we then read every scrap and scribble against the whole, and we will not find it strange that Joyce should invoke even the scrawling of the Earwicker twin as part of the image of Everymanthe-writer. The man who wrote the charming prattle of the *Journal to Stella* is the same who comes to howl at bay before the human race. In his life he made two bluestockings love him desperately (a significant choice this, that they should be bluestockings; but one, to his surprise, turned out, as sometimes happens, a very passionate bluestocking); and one he loved all his life long. In the simple *Prayers for Stella,* sublimating, he gropes, touches, fondles her in God. What happened beyond this we do not know. But we need no very fanciful imagination to guess the frustration which produces that mingled disgust and fascination at the biology of the female body. He did more, however, than release this into a few scatological verses about milady at and on her toilet; he was able to project his frustration and rage into the helpless Irish face about him, the insouciant Saxon face, churchmen, bishops, Lord Mayors, quacks, and pedants; "the corruptions and villainies of men in power"; and through these into a total vision of the human condition.

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Here at last we come close to the secret: if one characteristic of neurosis is always a displacement somewhere, then perhaps the test of a writer's achievement may be precisely the extent and richness of displacement he is able to effect. In the process of literary expression, the neurotic mass acquires energies which are directed toward reality and seek their satisfaction in reality. As the writer displaces the neurotic mass further afield he is led to incorporate larger and larger areas of experience into his vision. Everything begins to appear then *as if* the world he pictures were itself sufficient to generate this vision(which we may know, in fact, to have been rather the product of quite unconscious compulsions and conflicts); *as if* the ego, really master in its own house, were simply responding appropriately to the world as seen in the book. Thus the peculiar sense of conquest and liberation that follows literary creation cannot be analyzed solely as that fulfillment of wishes which normally occurs in daydreaming or fantasy. Why in that case would it be necessary to complete the literary work at all? And why should the liberation it gives be so much more powerful and durable? No; this conquest is also one for the ego itself, which now seems momentarily to have absorbed the unconscious into itself so that the neurotic disgust itself appears an appropriate response to reality. And if this is an illusion from the analyst's point of view, it may not always be an illusion from the moralist's point of view. The world as it appears in Swift's writings is, in the end, adequate to his madness.

2. *Power and Guilt*

Now Swift's (unlike Cowper's, to cite another literary madman) was a very strong ego, and the fact that he broke in old age only tells us how great were the visions, tensions, and repressions he had to face. We do not know enough to establish his "case," but we know enough to say that his madness probably did not have its source in the literary condition at all—however much incipient madness may have informed and made powerful his writings.

Do we build too much on his example then? Perhaps; but his figure, in its broad strong outlines (and the very simplicity of these outlines is to our advantage here), takes such a grip on the imagination that, pursuing this rather nocturnal meditation, I am loth to let him drop. He has taken us so far already that it seems worthwhile to journey a little way with him still into the darkness.

Certainly there is nothing, or very little, about Swift to make him a modern figure. He sits so solidly amid the prejudices and vir-

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tues of his age that we search in vain for any ideas in him that would seem to anticipate us. He was a man of parts rather than of ideas; and his very "rationality" is a kind of eighteenth-century prejudice, having little in common with what we struggle toward as our own, or even what the same century later in France was to discover so triumphantly as its own. He lived before modern political alternatives became very real or meaningful, and only his human hatred of the abuses of power might connect him remotely with some of our own attitudes. As a literary man, he is at the farthest distance from that neurotic specialist, the modern litterateur; he is not even a professional literary man in the sense of his contemporary, Pope, much less in the sense of the consecrated *rentier,* Flaubert. Thus we have no quarrel at all with certain professorial critics who point out that Swift was primarily interested in power and that he came by writing as an instrument of power or simply as a diversion. (What an unhappy conclusion, though, if we thought we had therefore to exclude him from something called "literature"!) And we might even go along a certain way with the generous hint of these critics that the frustration of his desires for power explains both his misanthropy and final insanity.

But does not logic teach us that an induction is strengthened more by a confirming instance further afield? and which at first glance might not seem to fall altogether under the class in question? And if Swift, who sits so solidly in his own age, leads us, when we but plunge deeply enough, into the world of the modern writer, should we not feel all the more assured that we have got at least a little below the surface? Already, beneath the solid outlines of his eighteenth-century figure, I begin to descry the shadows and depths of a *psychic type,* the writer—which has emerged, to be sure, spectacularly only in the two following centuries.

Now the trouble with the professors (and not only when they censure Swift for his craving for power) is that they have unconsciously created a figure of the writer in their own image: a well-bred person with well-tubbed and scrubbed motives, who approaches something specialized and disinterested that they call "literature" as if his function in the end were merely to provide them with books to teach. Perhaps the great writers themselves have unwittingly helped toward this deception? Has any one of them ever told us why he had to become a writer? They tell us instead: "To hold a mirror up to nature"; "To carry a mirror dawdling down a lane"; "To forge the uncreated conscience of my race"; etc., etc.—great

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blazons of triumph, formulae of their extraordinary achievement, before which we forget even to ask why they had to become writers. The great writer is the victorious suitor who has captured a beautiful bride in an incomparable marriage. There seems almost no point in asking him why he had to love and seek marriage: his reasons seem all too abundant, he has only to point to the incomparable attractions of his beloved. He has lost his private compulsions in the general—in the positive and admirable qualities, known to all men, of the thing achieved. (The Kierkegaardians, by the way, should remind themselves that life must be just such a conquest and appropriation of universals.) But life does not contain only such happy bridegrooms, otherwise we might never know all the enormities and paradoxes of love; and if there were only great geniuses among writers, perhaps we might never know this other truth: the compulsions and paradoxes on the dark side of their calling—which they, the great ones, could afford to forget in the daylight blaze of their triumph.

The mistake is not to have invoked the idea of power but, once invoked, not to have seen it through: we have but to pursue it far enough and we can find it present everywhere in Swift's writings, and indeed the central impulse of his prose itself (perhaps the best in English). What is that stripped and supple syntax but the design of greatest possible economy and force, by which he launches each sentence at its mark like a potent and well-aimed missile? (And each missile thuds against the bestial human face from which he would escape.) Swift's lack of interest in being a literary man as such may account, then, for some of his strongest qualities. The conception of literature as an instrument or a diversion or even a vanity may exist along with the power to produce the greatest literature: Pascal's conviction of the vanity of eloquence is one reason why he is a greater prose-writer than Valery, the aesthete, who mocks at this conviction. Here it seems almost as if from examining Swift's writings themselves we might arrive at Freud's perception: that the writer is more than commonly obsessed by a desire for power which he seeks to gratify through his public fantasies.

Because of an introverted disposition, he is unable to gratify this desire in the usual arenas of external action. Introversion is the brand of his calling: he is the divided man, his consciousness always present but a little absent, hovering over itself, ready to pounce and bring back some fragment to his notebooks. The introverted disposition suggests some excessive and compelling need to be loved; and we would suspect that here too it must result primally from some special

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strength or strain in the Oedipal relation. But whatever our speculation as to its source, the point of power remains clear; and if he seeks it by a detour, the writer's claims are nonetheless total: it is power of the most subtle kind that the writer wants, power over the mind and freedom of other human beings, his readers.

Such extraordinary claims of power, and particularly their indirectness of gratification, suggest immediately an ambivalent connection with that more than usually acute sense of guilt with which writers as a class seem to be endowed. (That Swift suffered from extraordinary obsessions of guilt toward the end of his life, we know by accounts of several sources; but most of his life, since he accepted Christianity without question, these guilt feelings were tapped and drained off into religion; hence it is that in his writing we usually encounter the aggressive and outgoing parts of his personality.) Georges Blin in "The Gash" (PARTISAN REVIEW, Spring 1946), has presented very eloquently some of the sadistic motives that operate in the artist. We should expect—in accordance with the usual ambivalence—a masochistic pattern to be equally operative, and perhaps even more to the fore because of the essential indirectness of the artist's drives toward power and sadism. What else explains the writer's extraordinary eagerness for the painful humility of his yoke as he crouches over his desk stubbornly weaving and reweaving his own being hundreds of times? "Thought, study, sacrifice, and mortification"—how he trembles with joy to put on these hairshirts of his solitude and calling! These punishments he inflicts upon himself over his desk will help to make clear then why writing should satisfy the claims of guilt upon him; why he should search so passionately for redemption upon the written page, and why as the paragraph takes shape beneath his pen he can feel for moments that his step has become a little less heavy on the face of the earth. But we should also know this ambivalence of power and guilt from phenomenological scrutiny. We never live in a purely private world, our consciousness is penetrated at every point by the consciousness of others, and what is it but one step from seeking redemption in one's own eyes to seeking it in the eyes of others? The movement by which we stoop to lift ourselves out of the pit of self-contempt is one and unbroken with that thrust which would carry us above the shoulders of our fellowmen.

And is not this ambivalent urge to power-guilt but the sign of that excessive need to be loved which has driven the writer into a profession where he must speak with *his own* voice, offer to the public gaze of the world so much of his own existence? Love to be con-

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quered by force, or taken as a gift of tenderness and pity for his confession.

But both the satisfaction (of power) and relief (from guilt), though they glow brightly, glow, alas, only for moments, and we live again in the shadow of ourselves. Nothing in the world (we are told) is a substitute for anything else, and if there is a point beyond which the writer can never satisfy these urges in literature itself, then this inability can no longer be regarded as peculiar to Swift, a deficiency of his "case," but an essential and mortifying aspect of the literary condition everywhere. So we come back to our point: Swift is certainly not a modern literary man, but we only had to go deep enough, and we have arrived at a world of impulses and motives that we recognize as our own.

3. *The Moderns. Aytré's Journey.*

Despite the ancient recognition, the modern world of the crack-up and breakdown has really become a new and almost discontinuous phenomenon. (First the continuity; now we must do justice to the other aspect, the discontinuity of the modern.) It is time we had an exhaustive and statistical study of the problem, done with the grubbing thoroughness of a Ph.D. thesis; for the present I would only suggest some of the main statistical categories: the madmen, those who broke, Swift, Cowper, William Collins, Christopher Smart, Hoelderlin, Ruskin; figures who were not altogether normal, if not altogether mad, like Blake; who, like Coleridge and DeQuincey, had to salvage themselves through drugs (the Romantic equivalent of the American Pattern); or who produce their writing out of a maximum anxiety, their personal rack of torture, like Baudelaire and Eliot; and from these on we could ramify off into all the various subtler neuroses that have afflicted literary men. Even from this sketchy suggestion of a list it begins to appear that the incidence of aberration, neurosis, or outright madness is such that one really begins to doubt whether these misfortunes are accidental to the profession of letters as such.*

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* The reader should compare, for a somewhat different view of the matter, Mr. Lionel Trilling's "Art and Neurosis" (PARTISAN REVIEW, Winter 1945). By indicating my disagreements with Mr. Trilling's admirable essay, perhaps I may sum up, in more scientific terms, the psychoanalytic view which lies at the base (perhaps a little hidden) of my own discussion.

Mr. Trilling's main point, perhaps, is that neurosis by itself will not make anyone a great writer; a proposition with which I am in complete agreement.

I would also agree with him that there are many neurotics among businessmen and scientists (though I doubt the scientists could match the incidence

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And at this point perhaps we ought to face openly the question whether there is not some original flaw—original sin, if you will—about the profession such that the writer's struggle to live it out completely must inevitably involve him in some kind of hubris; and whether, after all, the game is really worth the candle. Freud at one earlier point did suggest something like this: that art is a survival in our day of primitive magic, with some of the magical still hanging about its aspirations; which did not at all prevent him, we may notice, from deriving very deep pleasure and insight from great works of literature.

The fault, the accumulating difficulty, seem to come from the very advance itself of Western culture and history. In a story by Jean Paulhan, "*Aytré qui perd l'habitude*" (Aytré Loses the Knack"), the hero keeps a journal while leading a trek across Madagascar. En route across the country the entries in the journal are very simple and direct: we arrive, leave, chickens cost seven sous, we lay in a provision of medicines, etc. But with the arrival in the city of Ambositra the journal suddenly becomes complicated: discussions of ideas, women's headdresses, strange scenes and characters in the street. The most

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among literary men). But granting such widespread latent neuroticism (the wives of businessmen could tell us a lot, if they chose), the point would be that with the writer it is not latent but consciously exploited. My difference with Mr. Trilling is that I do not consider the question as primarily statistical: whether a certain group known as scientists contains as many neurotics as another group called writers. My main point, rather, is one about the *literary process* itself: that this process does, in a certain way, imitate the neurotic process and does exploit neurotic material.

Here it is pertinent to indicate my principal disagreement with Freud, who analyzes the effect of a literary work in terms of the pleasure obtained from fantasies and daydreams. This may do justice to our childish delight in romances —or to the level at which we read *Gulliver's Travels* in childhood. But it hardly does justice to the power which the fiction of Kafka, Joyce, or Proust has over us in our adult years. I hold instead that it is the writer's *identification* with his fantasy, rather than the aspect of fantasy itself, which has power over us, convinces us. (The phenomenon of identification, by the way, is very sparingly discussed by Freud, probably because the psychic transaction involved in it is still quite obscure.) And in this identification with fantasy the writer imitates, *up to a certain point,* one of the deepest and commonest phenomena of pathology.

Since Freud speaks of the cathexis (i.e., charge of psychic energy) which the child has toward the objects of play, he should have seen that the cathexis of the writer toward the objects of fantasy is more significant than the aspect of fantasy itself. We cited Kafka as a crucial case; equally crucial would be the case of Joyce, who rarely moves us through the elaborateness, surprise, or ingenuity of his fantasies, but by *the powerful charge he is able to lay on the most banal episode.*

The second element in my analytic view is, admittedly, more speculative, and concerns the *psychic type* which now seems to emerge with the modern writer. If we demand of the writer a deeper authenticity—identification with

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ordinary incidents of daily life become complicated and almost unexpressible to Aytré struggling to keep his journal. Paulhan is after other game in this tale, where we need not follow him; enough for us that we can take this journey of Aytré for a symbol of the march of writers in history as they progress toward subjects ever more complex, driven by the compulsion to "make it new." From this point of view Paulhan's title itself becomes something of a misnomer: Aytré's trouble is not that he has lost the knack—quite the contrary, he now has altogether too much of it. Become infinitely complicated, all-absorbing, possessive, now the knack *has him*. Aytré, in short, has become a modern writer. He had begun as the simple scribe of the clan.

"Make it new," Pound cried, and Eliot further explicated: Modern poetry must be complicated because modern life is complicated. Both have passed into famous slogans in defense of modernism; but both abbreviate what is a much more complicated process, and have to be expanded in the light or darkness of Aytré's painful jour-

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fantasy—then I think we must expect that more and more only a certain psychic type will be at once capable of this, and also driven to embrace it as his own painful profession. We have suggested (speculatively) that the individual who is driven to exhibit such large slices of his psyche to the world is compelled by an excessive need for the winning of love. Whether or not this hypothesis be verified by literary and biographical evidence, it should not surprise us, at any rate, that the modern writer (capable of satisfying our severe demands) has become, by and large, a neurotic type.

The third element of my view, however, attempts to separate the neurosis of the writer from that of other men. The writer's neurosis, through displacement and appropriation, attempts to square itself with reality—but only in the work.

Here I reach some agreement with Mr. Trilling—but not completely or fundamentally. When he speaks of the writer's ability to "shape" the neurotic material, he seems to suggest that this latter may be some kind of clay external to the writer, and that there is some portion of the mind which remains completely outside the neurosis. This notion of control seems also to imply that the writer attains, through the work, health and wholeness in his life too.

This strikes me as quite unguarded from an analytic point of view. The great counterexample that comes immediately to mind is one from painting: the case of Van Gogh (recently discussed by Mr. Meyer Shapiro), who, a few days after painting "Crows in the Wheatfield" and writing to his brother that the country was "healthful and strengthening," committed suicide! The triumph of the ego, in short, is in the work and not the life. It is, as I have said, an "as if" triumph. Swift did not heal himself by writing *Gulliver's Travels*.

The source of the catharsis, by the way, that Van Gogh obtained from that particular painting has to be analyzed in terms of this essay: the momentary triumph of the ego is that it has now appropriated elements from reality corresponding to its own torments, and depicted a scene to which these torments seem an adequate response, and so has the illusion that its own reality principle has been restored and safeguarded.

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ney. The writer objectifies his fantasies (that much of Freudian formula we have to use in any case) but he must return to view them with the analytic eyes of daylight and criticism. But this reality to which he submits is not what he meets if he gazes out into the world with the naked eyes of the first-born man; the reality principle for the writer is one qualified by the works, the recorded experience and knowledge of man, already in existence. After Proust no one can write about love with the old charming simplicity of Prevost. It would be pastiche: archaic and unauthentic. In Prevost it charms us, it is real and convincing. At his cutural moment, love—as the simple lovely disease of sensibility—was itself an extraordinary *donnée,* and the writer could find such release in it that he was capable of the necessary identification with his fantasy. (Even when a form like the novel swings back momentarily into a simpler pattern, the new simplicity is quite different from the old; the simplicity of Gide is not the old simplicity of the classical French novel, but a new one—self-conscious, difficult, refined, defining its slender line from the sum of its rejections.) Hence it appears that Pound's manifesto, and Eliot's recommendation of a complication to parallel the complication of modern life, formulate effect rather than cause; we ought instead to put it that the writer, existing in his time, in his place, and with his past must make such discoveries as to secure the completeness of release necessary to achieve authenticity. If he repeats what is already discovered, he has no chance of making it *his.* That is why his existence is relentlessly historical and he has to travel Aytré's journey. Now the reality principle functions in life chiefly (or its function is felt more forcibly there) to inhibit the gratification of desire. Its literary analogue functions in the same way: it checks the writer from releasing himself into the fantasies that are unreal, trivial, or superficial. To find his authenticity, a material into which he is completely released, the writer has now to dig ever deeper, the unconscious that is released must be at deeper and deeper levels. So he finds, like Aytré, the literary "knack" become absorbing and terrifying. Hence the burden of neurosis that weighs more and more heavily upon the modern man of letters.

4. *Increasing Burdens.*

The more gifted the writer the more likely he is to be critically conscious of his literary tradition—the more conscious, that is, of the reality principle as it operates in the literary sphere—and the harder it becomes for him to fall into one of the easy publicist styles of his day. Recently I read about a young writer who had written a best-

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seller in four weeks and made $400,000 out of it—$100,000 a week, almost as good pay as a movie star. If books could be written from the top of one's mind merely (even books of this kind), it is naïve to think a major writer would not do it: after four weeks of absence he returns to support himself for many years in the prosecution of his own unremunerative and serious tasks. But it seems impossible to write a best-seller in complete parody, one has to believe in one's material even there, and it is impossible to fake unless one is a fake. Joyce has written in *Ulysses* a superb parody of the sentimental romance for schoolgirls, but it is quite obvious from that chapter that Joyce could not have turned out a novel in this genre for money: his irony and self-consciousness would have got in the way, and the book would not have attracted its readers but in the end only Joyce's readers. The writer writes what he can, and if he decides to sell out it is by corrupting and cheapening his own level, or perhaps slipping down a step below it; but writing is not so uncommitted an intellectual effort that he can drop down facilely to a very much lower level and operate with enough skill there to convince that kind of reader. Joyce did not write *Finnegans Wake* out of a free decision taken in the void, but because his experience of life and Western culture was what it was, and he had to write that book if he was to write anything.

It is perhaps not a very pleasant thought, but it seems inescapable, that even the commonest best-seller is the product of the personal being of the author and demands its own kind of authenticity. Life also imprisons us in its rewards; and we may draw some satisfaction from the thought that these gay reapers of prestige and money, if they are to keep on terms with their audience, can have in the end only lives adequate to their books: *On écrit le livre qu'on merite.* Our satisfaction might be greater if we were not on the other hand also painfully acquainted with the opposite phenomenon: the gifted people who find it difficult to produce precisely because they are too intelligent and sensitive to tailor their writing to the reigning market. The very awareness of standards inhibits them from writing, and, not being geniuses, they are unable to break through and produce anything adequate to those standards. The literary future in America, and perhaps the West generally, seems to be leading to this final and lamentable split: on the one hand, an enormous body of run-of-the-mill writing (machine-made, as it were), becoming ever more slick as it becomes more technically adequate through abundant competition and appropriation of the tricks of previous serious writing, and in the end generating its own types of pseudo authenticity, like Stein-

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beck or Marquand; on the other hand, an occasional genius breaking through this wall here and there, at ever more costly price in personal conflict, anguish, and difficulty. Modern poetry already provides us its own and extreme version of this exacerbating split; think of the extremity of personal difficulty required to produce the authentic poetry of our time: the depth of anguish which secreted the few poems of Eliot; and Yeats, we remember, had to struggle through a long life of political unrest, personal heartbreak, see the friends and poets of his youth die off or kill themselves, before he came into his own and could produce poems capable of convincing us that this poetry was not merely a kind of "solemn game."

Some of the more internal difficulties that beset the pursuit of literature are being very much discussed in France by writers like Maurice Blanchot and Brice Parain. Blanchot finishes one essay, in which he has explored certain aspects of anxiety, silence, and expression, with the devastating remark, "It is enough that literature should continue to seem possible," though the reader by the time he has waded through Blanchot's rarefactions to that point may very well have lost the conviction that even the possibility remained. These French researches are of a quite special character, continuing the tradition of Mallarmé—or, rather, attempting to see the aesthetic problems of Mallarmé from the human anguish of Pascal. (As the burdens of civilization become heavier and we see existence itself with fewer illusions, we have come perhaps to share Pascal's attitude toward poetry: a vanity, a "solemn game"; at any rate, we seem to demand more of the modern writer before we take him very seriously.) These difficulties are extreme and we need not share them in that form: after the rigors to which Mallarmé submitted poetry in his search for a *"langage authentique"* no wonder silence should appear as the only and haunting possibility of speech. After Mallarmé, poetry had to swing back toward the language of what he calls *"universel reportage,"* and Eliot's poetry has shown us that this language, suitably charged and concentrated, can be the vehicle of very great poetry. Blanchot's difficulties persist but in another form (especially in a commercial culture). Not silence but garrulousness ("unauthentic chatter," as Heidegger would say) may be the threat confronting the writer; but always and everywhere the difficulty of securing authenticity.

The difficulties we face in America—a society which turns, as Van Wyck Brooks says, its most gifted men into crackpots—are obviously of a much more external and violent kind than in France.

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External pressures abet the internal tensions, which become unendurable, and at long last comes that slide over into the more tranquil and private self-indulgence of fantasy with a consequent weakening of the reality principle. One (a critic) develops a private language; another spins out elaborate literary theories without content or relevance; a third has maintained his literary alertness and eye for relevance through a sheer aggressiveness which has cost him his ability to maintain personal relations—and which appears therefore in his work as a mutilation too. Scott Fitzgerald's confidante in "The Crack-up" (perhaps his most mature piece of writing, at that) gives him the extraordinary advice: *"Listen. Suppose this wasn't a crack in you—suppose it was in the Grand Canyon. . . . By God, if I ever cracked, I'd try to make the whole world crack with me."* And she was right and profound, but Fitzgerald was tied by too many strings to the values of American life to see her truth. His crack-up was the dawning of a truth upon him which he could not completely grasp or recognize intellectually. Swift in that position would have seen that the crack is in the Grand Canyon, in the whole world, in the total human face about him. If he is powerful enough—now against greater odds—to make the world crack in his work, the writer has at the least the gratification of revenge, and the ego that deeper conquest (described above) where its anguish now seems no more than an appropriate response to a world portrayed (and with some fidelity) as cracked. But, alas, these energies which seek reality and are capable of transforming the neurotic mass into the writer's special and unique vision of the world can also be blocked by the external difficulties in the literary situation. And when that happens we open the door, as Freud says, to the psychoses—at any rate, to the breakdown and crack-up.

5. *Abi Viator*
*Et Imitare Si Poteris**

And so I am brought back into the center of my theme. If I appeared to have abandoned the theme of neurosis for the difficulties, external and internal, that confront the modern writer, it was only because these difficulties as part of his alienation are the aggravating causes and public face of his madness.

But why (in the end) should it be the writer's fate—more than of any other intellectual profession—to confront this crack in the face of the world? Because his subject is the very world of experience as

* From Swift's epitaph: "Go, traveler, and imitate him if you can."

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such, and it is this world, this total world, which he must somehow salvage. The scientist has his appointed place in the community of researchers, he confronts carefully delimited fragments of experience, the data from which he proceeds are publicly recognizable, and his whole being is to be, as it were, an incarnate outward public mind. But the writer is alone—potentially twenty-four hours a day, the luminol pill and the writing pad beside his bed for whatever welcome or unwelcome presence comes that night. On the other hand, it might seem that the philosopher, since he confronts in his own way the totality of experience might also show some fatal tendency toward aberration. But the philosopher deals with concepts and out of these he may construct some kind of "meaning" for the world: when speculative systems were still believed, he had only to be agile enough to design one of these towering arks of salvation, and what if it leaked a little, he was a professor and he had something to do the rest of his professorial life plugging its gaps; now when the pretense to speculative theories is no longer even taken seriously the philosopher can construct an equally elaborate theory showing that the question itself has no meaning, and so philosophy continues to be possible. Whatever the impasse of insoluble antinomies at which his thought finally arrives, he can continue to arrange these in neat parallel columns, chip away at their edges and perpetually recast their statement as if preparing bit by bit for a solution which in fact never arrives; and so continues in business, he has something to say, he "gets published"; and after the initial shocks and disturbance mankind has shown itself capable of settling down peacefully into positivism, and few people are more intellectually adjusted than the positivists. But it is not at the level of concepts that the appalling face of the world is seen, and it is another kind of "meaning" that the writer must construct. Out of the ravages of his experience, his desperate loneliness, he must put forth those works which look back into his gaze with conviction and authenticity and wear about them the gleams of interest—cathectic charges, in the technical term—which have fled from the vast bare blank face of the world as seen in the extreme situations of *his* truth: in sleeplessness, the nervous darkness, against death and against the inexorable and dragging vista of time which is his being.

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The Future of Socialism

SIDNEY HOOK

(EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article is the first in a series on "The Future of Socialism." Among the other contributors to this symposium will be James Burnham, Granville Hicks, Arthur Koestler, George Orwell, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Victor Serge, and others to be announced. The editorial statement printed below was sent to the contributors to serve as a basis for discussion.*)

Historical experience since 1917 *has put the entire socialist perspective into question. For nearly a century this perspective has provided both an optimistic view of history and confidence in the possibility of establishing a rational human order. At the present time, however, it has become so problematical that it can no longer serve the Left as the basis for its political life.*

The Russian Revolution has not only failed to realize the hopes invested in it, but has actually produced a totalitarian system with a dynamism of its own that throttles the development of socialist thought and democratic socialist movements. The working class has so far failed to fulfill the historic mission so often proclaimed for it by the theoreticians of Marxism. Both in Nazi Germany and in Russia, to cite the extreme examples, the workers showed themselves so little capable of controlling their political fate that far from achieving socialism they actually have been reduced to a virtual state of enslavement; and in relatively free countries like France, post-Fascist Italy, and the United States, the masses, insofar as they have been radicalized, have not been able to distinguish between true socialism and its Stalinist perversion. At the same time, despite the lessons of two world wars, nationalism still persists as a myth, dominating the mind of the masses and preventing the emergence of a truly internationalist consciousness.

As a result, the Left has fallen into a state of intellectual disorientation and political impotence. Many intellectuals have abandoned socialism altogether, asserting that freedom is compatible only with the economic structure of capitalism. Others have embraced some kind of Machiavellian theory of history, according to which the future can-

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not but repeat the past in breeding a perpetual succession of ruling elites. Still others have tried to cope with their disillusionment by entirely abandoning the field of politics and retreating to a position of quietism, pacifism, and moral salvation. Meanwhile, where the Left has ostensibly come into power, as in Great Britain, it has shown itself to be the prisoner of the old national and imperialist drives. The second World War has not produced any genuinely creative political tendencies; and the pressure of Stalinism on Western Europe is so powerful as to prevent their very inception.

Can we believe, then, that these are only temporary setbacks for socialism? Or must we believe that the classic socialist position has to be discarded? If, however, this position is still tenable, through what instrumentalities can socialism be expected to come into being? If the traditional belief in the necessity of revolution is still valid, what reasons are there to think that such revolutions are not bound to raise to power a new class of oppressors? Are any new outlooks or attitudes needed to replace those presuppositions of the old socialist movement that may now have become questionable—such as the faith in the inevitability of progress, the idea that the development of socio-economic forces in modern society will necessarily produce a socialist consciousness, and that the proletariat is the class destined to carry humanity toward the goal of a classless society?

I AM a democrat. I am a socialist. And I am still a Marxist in the sense in which one may speak of a modern biologist as still a Darwinian. I am a democrat because I believe that the guiding principle of social life should be an *equality* of concern for all individuals to develop their personalities *freely*. I am a socialist because I believe that the conditions upon which the moral and political ideals of democracy depend require a large measure of planning in production, and that to be effective this planning must carry with it in basic sectors of industry those powers of control which define social ownership. I am willing to call myself a Marxist because I believe that Marx's leading ideas, as I interpret them, and revised in the light of the scientific method which he himself professed to follow, are better guides to achieving socialism—*if* it can be achieved—than any other alternative set of ideas known to me.

The evidence for the validity of democracy, socialism, and Marxism rests on empirical considerations of varying orders of generality

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which I have discussed at length elsewhere.* Validity, insofar as it is not a purely logical notion, is a matter of degree and shifts with the critically evaluated findings of experience. In the light of historical experience a major revision in the conception of socialism seems necessary. It was a mistake to conceive of a socialist economy as planned in its entirety. There is good reason now to believe that some form of mixed economy can more reliably secure the goals of democracy without the inefficiency, bureaucracy, and evasion of responsibility that seem attendant upon a completely planned system of production.

From my point of view, one may be a democrat without being a socialist or a Marxist. But one cannot be a socialist or a Marxist without being a democrat—without that passion for human freedom and equality which suffuses the writings and actions of the founders of the socialist movement. One may be a socialist without being a Marxist, but not conversely.

For the last twenty years I have presented an interpretation of Marx which has run counter to customary views and conceptions of his fundamental doctrines. Orthodox Marxism, either in its social-democratic variety or in its more grotesque distortions, Leninism—Trotskyism—Stalinism, seems to me to be an elaborate series of myths, confused in idea and vicious in consequence. It would appear that if I were justified in my interpretation of Marx's meaning, I would be perhaps the only true Marxist left in the world. This is too much for my sense of humor, and so I have decided to abandon the term as a descriptive epithet of my position—all the more willingly because I am interested in the validity of ideas rather than in their historical derivation. Certainly, if the Stalinists and their international salon of fellow-traveling litterateurs and totalitarian liberal politicos—whose ignorance of the subject is as broad as their dogmatism is deep—are Marxists, then I am cheerfully resigned to being non-Marxist.

So pervasive is the influence of orthodox Marxism that it has affected the formulations of the questions by the editors of PR. We are asked what reasons we have for thinking that socialism is not "bound" to raise to power a new class of oppressors. We are asked if we still retain belief in the "inevitability" of progress, in the view that social change will "necessarily" produce socialist consciousness, in the doctrine that the proletariat is "destined" to be the carrier of the socialist

* Cf. "Naturalism and Democracy" in *Naturalism and the Human Spirit* (N. Y., 1945); *Reason, Social Myths and Democracy* (N. Y., 1940); Chapters XI and XII of *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility* (N. Y., 1943); "The Moral Force of Socialism" and "Freedom and Socialism," *The New Leader*, 1944-5.

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ideal. Now, it seems to me that to phrase matters this way is to beg many questions not merely about Marx's meaning but about the nature of the social process. Nothing in a history which is made by men is "bound" to happen; and even nonhistorical events are evitable, for their occurrence is dependent upon other events concerning which we cannot correctly say that they must happen. The absurdity of all these presuppositions about "inevitabilities" and "determining" social laws from which we can spell out the shape of the future is graphically underscored by the potentialities of the atomic bomb. It is the height of intellectual parochialism to imagine that the liberation of nuclear energy opens up a new era of life or disaster in social and political experience but leaves untouched the perspectives and relevance of socialist thought. The fact that atomic war may break out within the next few years and that such a war may destroy civilization, as we know it, with all its prospects of socialism, should naturally make a difference to intelligent thinking on the future of socialism.

The harnessing of nuclear energy makes immensely more feasible the solution of the problems of production on a world scale. At the same time, a handful of technical and military personnel, in an undemocratic society, could easily prevent any attempt to change the political or social character of the economy. Hence these are questions that are prior to, and more immediately pressing than, all others. Marx was one of the first to allow for the influence of science and scientific technology upon society. But he didn't allow enough for it—and for its relative autonomy. And there is no reason to believe that had he lived, the man who could not sleep for thinking about the effects of a new steam locomotive exhibited in the 1850's would have lacked the wit and imagination to see that he would have had to recast many conclusions and theories, particularly about the methods of achieving socialism, that had seemed valid at an earlier time.

Taking an historical view, the situation, as I see it, is briefly this. The whole burden of Marx's analysis, and particularly his recommendations for *action* based on it, made sense only on the assumption that the working class and its allies would accept responsibility for the role which their feelings and the situation in which they had been cast, suggested to them; and further that at the opportune moments of crisis in the development of capitalism, they would move with intelligence and courage to bring the political and cultural relations of society into line with the potentialities of its productive forces. This, for a number of reasons we shall not inquire into, the working class failed to do. Its most momentous failures were in 1914, and in 1919,

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the beginning and end of the First World War, and in 1933 when Hitler rose to power. Since then together with the world community generally, it has been paying for the consequences of those failures. The rise of totalitarian states and the advances in military technology have produced a new historical situation in which the whole Marxist strategy of achieving democratic socialism must be revised.

Up to the rise of totalitarianism the main drift of historical events could be fairly anticipated by assigning the predominant weight to economic needs and relations, within and between states, as they disclosed themselves in the course of capitalistic expansion and recession. After that time, political and even moral considerations became more decisive, although economic forces continued to play an important role in narrowing the range of significant alternatives of historical action. This is best illustrated in the alignment of powers in World War II, in which the capitalist world combined with Russia to defeat Germany, whose economy each one regarded as closer to its ally than to itself. But although the problems are more complex, one can be just as scientific about moral and political factors in history as about economic tendencies, from which they are distinguishable, yet not separable.

The great errors of the Marxist movement did not arise only as responses to sudden calamities. They were logical culminations of errors of judgment and action on the specific issues of the day. Theoretical doctrines contributed as they determined long-time patterns and habits of thought which in turn affected feeling. Among the most fateful of these doctrines was the view that counterposed "formal democracy" to "real democracy," whose consequences we see all around us in the semantic confusion according to which Russia is a democracy of another kind. The orthodox analysis of democracy distinguished between its "formal" elements—the forms and processes of the expression and registration of freely given consent—and its "real" content, the equal enjoyment of political power and economic rights and privileges. In the interests of this alleged "real" democracy, "formal" democracy was disparaged. Restrictions upon it were regarded lightly if only some change toward equality in social status and security were promised. But the true dialectical irony of the situation was that "formal" democracy turned out to be more "real"—in the sense of important for socialist practice—than anything which was substituted for it.

I have always maintained that in key places the language of Marx is couched in nineteenth-century idioms whose meaning cannot be understood without some study of the philosophical and political

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climate of opinion of the time. This is particularly true of some of his Hegelian terminology which appears in the literature of orthodox Marxism with different connotations. For example, in Hegel the contrast between the terms, "formal" and "real," so familiar to us in current Marxist writing, does not mean the same thing as the contrast between the terms, "abstract" and "concrete," with which they are often used interchangeably. The abstract has no existence without the concrete, and in modern usage it suggests a vague promise for which we would gladly trade something more tangible and reliable. In Hegel, however, the distinction between "formal" and "real" is a distinction between "partial" and "complete." Consequently the relation between the two is one of fulfillment rather than of opposition, and it would make no sense to speak of exchanging one for another or making a choice between them. Political democracy can be considered "partial" whenever the social and economic conditions in which it operates limit the scope of its effectiveness. Or it can be considered "partial" whenever its underlying moral values are absent from other realms of experience. But one doesn't surrender the "partial" when one reaches out for the "whole"—and it is downright absurd to imagine that by surrendering political democracy one can get any other kind of democracy. And yet this was the illusion of many who thought of themselves as Marxists—particularly Lenin. This illusion has become the chief theoretical capital of the totalitarian liberals. It has blinded even otherwise clear-minded individuals who can see through the hollow pretensions of Franco, Salazar, Mussolini, and Hitler, all of whom at one time or another professed to be abandoning formal political democracy for the sake of its real substance.

The plain truth is that of all values of social life today, those embodied in the institutional practices and attitudes of political democracy are the most strategic. For without them no other values of a freedom-loving society can prosper. That profound thinker, Henry Wallace, darling of the totalitarian liberals, is wont to contrast political democracy in the United States with the "economic democracy" of the Soviet Union. But in what possible sense can we speak of economic democracy, which involves uncoerced participation in determining the conditions, goals, and rewards of work, without freedom of speech, criticism, and opposition so basic to political democracy? How can ethnic democracy exist if every national group is compelled to follow the same political line and can use its national tongue to express only what is permitted? In the absence of strategic political freedoms, the moral quality of all basic values is transformed. Deny a people the

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freedom of the Bill of Rights and security becomes slavery, vocation forced labor, privacy concealment, the family a hutch for mass breeding, the school an outpost of the state, social intelligence a technique of rationalization, art and literacy weapons to impose conformity, the person a subject.

As I have already indicated, I believe that democracy can best be realized through a socialist economy broadly conceived to include voluntary co-operatives and certain sectors of free enterprise. Insofar as hunger, insecurity, and gross inequalities in opportunity and living conditions are foes of freedom, I am also convinced that democracy can best be *defended* against the danger of totalitarianism by socialist measures. But I do not believe that these relationships can be made credible to those who confuse socialism with Stalinism, or immediately persuasive to principled democrats who are unsure about the detailed economic system necessary to strengthen democracy *in the limited time that remains for men to decide whether the world is to become a union of democratic states or one totalitarian world order.* And since I am first a democrat and then a socialist—in the sense that I am more profoundly convinced of the validity of the democratic ideals than of any specific way of achieving them—I believe in consequence that our main emphasis must fall upon the ideals and practices of political democracy and those measures of socialization and social control that are easily derivable from it. This means a theory of piecemeal socialism through the democratic process. The growth of a socialist economy never was, and certainly is not now, a matter of economic law but of political decision based upon the verifiable relations between social organization, human values, and the needs and interests at their root.

In this defense of democracy and its extension we should be willing to accept allies from any group or class. But I confess to a certain skepticism concerning the reliability of organized capitalist groups in the struggle for democracy, and its enrichment. Although the Leninist theory that fascism is the dictatorship of finance capital is demonstrably false, we cannot blind ourselves to the actual help the capitalists of Germany, Italy, and other countries, including our own, gave to the forces of fascism. Some capitalists undoubtedly wished that Lenin's theory of the nature of fascism were true. But it turned out otherwise. In the nature of the case those for whom capitalism, either as a system of free enterprise or monopoly control, is more important than the preservation of a democratic culture, cannot always pool their own best interests together. The *class* capitalist

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interest is not made up by compounding individual interests. This explains why many individual capitalists in acting to further their own interests often act against the interests of their class. It explains why capitalists in pursuit of immediate profit will support totalitarian regimes whose expansion would wipe out not only personal freedom but the possibility of private profit as well. And in the last analysis, it explains why both Churchill and Roosevelt tossed away the liberties of European peoples for what looked like an equitable division of the world into spheres of imperial influence. For all of Churchill's present eloquence about Tito's iron rule, it was he who was mainly responsible for raising this puppet of the Kremlin's into power.

On the other hand, I have no doubt that there are some capitalists for whom the values of a democratic way of life take precedence over the amount of profit they can make, and who to save the first would be reconciled to a diminution of the second. Proportionately they may be just as numerous as those workers and labor leaders who are prepared to destroy democratic processes if they can see some economic advantage to themselves in so doing.

In the light of the foregoing, I wish to consider the perspectives of action for domestic policy and international action. I shall consider the latter first.

A union of all democratic elements in the community will throw its full strength on the international scene behind the slowly evolving pattern of British socialism, now shedding its rather mangy coat of imperialism, and against the Russian police state. There is growing recognition of the fact that the ineptitude of American foreign policy and the ideological unsophistication of its representatives have made things easier for the Russians. It is clear now that the Vishynskys, Manuilskys, and Molotovs are not merely a foreign variety of American politicians. What is not yet clear to those responsible for American foreign policy is that capitalism in other countries of the world is either dead or dying, that it cannot be revived, and that the peoples of the world will not be won for an American imperialist rule more interested in a favorable balance of trade than in the welfare of the impoverished masses. One cannot win starving people by "talk" about democracy, especially when totalitarians "talk" about democracy too.

The only chance of strengthening a world front against totalitarianism is by building a *democratic* analogue to Stalin's multinational Bolshevism. Stalin's foreign rule is imposed on other nations

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through native quislings who cleverly exploit national sentiment to cover up the betrayal of the national interest. If Anglo-American economic policy could be co-ordinated to embrace the democratic countries still outside the Russian orbit so that they were convinced they were genuine partners and not vassals, it would do more to bolster their struggles than a whole flock of diplomatic notes. By preserving the democratic processes in these countries and at the same time making effective use of Western economic weight to increase living standards for the masses, the issue would be clearly drawn around the question of freedom.

The political strategy of this union of democratic powers either inside or outside the United Nations should be motivated by a desire to avoid war and prevent the one world of planned enslavement which is the Russian program. If war can be avoided under existing conditions, there is only one way to do it. That is by a concentration of destructive power, under an international authority, which would make any act of aggression by any power suicidal. Every scheme of disarmament must therefore be complemented by a system of collective security which would safeguard the international community against those who violate the disarmament convention.

Without the checks and controls of international inspection no program of disarmament is worth the paper it is printed on. *But even with provision for inspection there is no security unless a free public opinion exists in all the signatory nations.* For only where public opinion is free can the secret violations of disarmament agreements be disclosed. Such a free public opinion exists in democratic countries—because they recognize the right of an opposition to be heard, and because they provide opportunities through the press, radio, and public assembly to make charges of noncompliance known. For example, the attempt of the Reichswehr in the German Republic to conceal its military preparations was defeated because the political system made it possible for the Lessings, von Ossietskys, and Tucholskys, despite the persecution to which they were subjected, to proclaim their findings to the world. In the United States, the inspectors could count upon the co-operation of many citizens, inside and outside the government, to report any evidence of violations. But in a totalitarian society the inspectors are without allies, and they could not take any effective steps to discover what the government was concealing from them. The tighter the dictatorial controls are in any society, the more fantastic it is to assume that there will be a widespread disposition on the part of its citizens to reveal the treachery of the government to its signed

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word. The threat of atomic war may seem remote to those who come into the possession of such information, but the penalty for raising questions or criticizing the integrity of their leaders will be immediate. What I am saying is that an agreement on international inspection can very easily become a trap unless all nations capable of waging war are democracies—*political* democracies.

What does this mean with respect to Russia? At least two things First, a policy of watchful waiting by an international authority committed to a policy of collective security—until the Russians themselves change their form of government into a democracy with a legally recognized right of opposition. It is not necessary to intervene in Russian internal affairs in the way in which Soviet Russia has been intervening in the affairs of other nations. Perhaps things will change after Stalin's death, perhaps not. Second, the democratic aspects of our own culture must be strengthened. The reason is not, as is sometimes said, to induce the Russian people to abolish their dictatorship by showing them that freedom and a high standard of living are possible. For what the Russians think about other countries depends not on what these countries do but on what the rigorously censored Russian press and radio tell them. Nothing we can do can affect that. The reason is, in addition to those discussed above, that such strengthening of our democracy will prevent the Russian quislings in this country from exploiting our own weaknesses and conflicts.

If the Western statesmen don't understand that the world cannot remain half slave and half free, the Russians do, and they are engaged in the most extensive propaganda effort since the Comintern was founded to make the one world their world. The weaknesses and injustices of our democracy provide them with excellent material for propaganda. And events themselves may constitute the best propaganda for them. Another depression and its attendant chaos would seriously threaten popular allegiance to democratic processes. Even where widespread unemployment and insecurity exist, those who know the truth about Russian life will prefer their difficult lot with the possibilities of improving it, to anything resembling the Russian way of life. But the sad fact is that large numbers of workers do not know the truth about the nature of Russian life. When difficult conditions become desperate, still larger numbers will not want to know the truth. Or they will swallow the assurances that the dictatorial features of Russian culture are purely local in significance and have no essential connection with the Bolshevist creed.

That is why I am hopeful that those who wish to preserve democ-

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racy will see in the course of the struggle for it that the development of a welfare economy along broad socialist lines is its best safeguard. The future of socialism depends upon the preservation to the last ditch of political democracy. But the future of democracy may depend upon winning for the masses the economic benefits of socialism.

Despite some uncertain signs in England, the English workers—and perhaps all politically literate elements not confused by the Webb-Laski line—can be counted upon to co-operate with the United States in establishing a democratic lead. But what are the prospects for the development of such a lead in America, particularly a democratic socialist lead? In terms of conventional, orthodox Marxism, they are very dim. In terms of a mass political movement that starts from democratic premises and seeks to derive the content of a socialist program from them, they are much better. Three things are required to set a movement of this kind into action.

First, the unification of the American labor movement into a conscious political force. The militancy of the American working class, and despite its divisions, its enormous power, has been demonstrated over again in recent years. An enlightened leadership—which is potentially present but not yet in command—must unify the ranks, induce them to clean house both of their racketeers and Communist traitors, and develop a program of progressive social action that will appeal to other groups in the population.* Failure to recognize the indispensability of political organization is always a telltale sign either of social and moral irresponsibility or of metaphysical obsession with allegedly overriding historical necessities.

Second, despite their comparatively small numbers, the totalitarian liberals have so poisoned the climate of opinion in America that it is difficult for most progressive-minded people to distinguish between the friends and the foes of the democratic tradition. An intellectual rearming of the liberal forces in this country must be undertaken which will reaffirm the tradition of creative freedom, integrity to oneself, and honesty to others that has been corrupted, as much by bad politics as by business. The false fronts, the deceptions and

* Since writing the above I have read Lewis Corey's excellent "Ideas for a New Party" in the *Antioch Review* for Autumn 1946. The main section on domestic policy is splendid. The section on foreign policy suffers from a failure to distinguish clearly between the decaying economic and political colonialism of the capitalist democracies and "communist imperialism in the form of Russian expansionism."

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confusions propagated by the conscious and unconscious followers of the Communist Party line must be pitilessly exposed. It is ironical that although the Communists have captured central posts in the labor movement, American workers by and large have escaped infection by illusions of Sovietland. Whatever mass base the Communist Party has in this country is to be found among the professionals and so-called "intellectuals." This influence is reflected in the newspaper columns, the radio commentaries, the periodicals and publishing houses and other agencies of communication and education. When it goes into action on a national scale, it can mold public opinion on many vital issues. Some brilliant feats have been pulled off, for example, the campaign for a second front, and the campaigns against Mihailovich and Chiang Kai-shek. And no one is so high in American political life that he cannot be tricked into joining a "front" organization.*

Third, a reconstituted liberal labor coalition in America must reach out to embrace the co-operatives, teachers and public servants, farmers, small businessmen, and all other individuals, irrespective of their economic origins or status, who are more concerned about retaining the processes of democracy than about any specific advantage they hope to win through them. The great weakness of American labor is that it has permitted itself to be jockeyed into a position in which it appears as arrayed against the population as a whole, and in which its legitimate demands can easily be pictured as a selfish disregard of the public welfare. Lewis may have strengthened the immediate position of the coal miners—who have every moral right to much better conditions than those Lewis has secured for them—but by his fantastic public-relations policy, he has harmed American labor more than Weir and Girdler. He has done what the most rabid open-shoppers have failed to do—drawn the resentment of the American public to labor. And he is not the only one.

There are some considerations, however, that must be added

* It is not commonly known that the Communist League of American Writers, through the efforts of sympathetic intermediaries, even snared Franklin D. Roosevelt as a member! It was only when, as Executive Chairman of the Committee for Cultural Freedom, I sent an inquiry to the White House that his affiliation was confidentially canceled in order to prevent the Republicans from making political capital out of it in 1940. The Communist Party fraction was getting ready to publish the fact of the President's affiliation in order "to prove" that the organization, whose founding plans were first laid in Earl Browder's office, was not a Communist Party front. Mention of the President's membership slipped out in a speech by D. O. Stewart, reprinted in the League *Bulletin*, Vol. VI, No. 1, p. 11.

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whose importance will be apparent to all liberals, democrats, and socialists except those who have never engaged in political or social action. These may be summed up in the observation that there can be no truce in the war against Stalinism in America and that this war must be conducted primarily by *them,* not by the government. There can be no truce because so long as the Russian dictatorship exists, there will be a Russian fifth column in this country which will seek to capture or destroy every independent movement in labor, politics, or culture. The incurable muddleheads who every time Stalinism is criticized cry out that American reaction is equally bad—that a situation in which evils are remediable by courageous democratic action is just as bad as one in which there is not the slightest possibility of such action—must in effect be regarded as unconscious allies of the Stalinists. They give currency to the Stalinists' slander that their critics are not struggling against evils in the American scene. They claim to fight on both fronts simultaneously and with equal fervor—against American capitalist democracy and Russian totalitarianism. Since this would be silly if the evils were not of the same order, they must *always* affirm that they are. But their practice shows a strange inconsistency. For although they are always willing to join with the Stalinists in attacking the evils of Western democracy, they refuse to associate themselves with liberal or democratic criticism of dictatorial political practices in Russia. In effect, they believe that capitalist democracy at its best is less desirable than Russian totalitarianism at its worst. They are comparable to those who refused to become aroused about the organized excesses and butcheries of the Nazis on the ground that our own hands were not altogether clean, and who were therefore prepared to let Hitlerism sweep the world.

The task of purification must be undertaken by genuine democrats since the reactionaries—especially those who admire Russia because labor knows its place there!—cannot be trusted to distinguish between Stalinists and those who are not. Their categories are too broad. They usually have other political fish to fry. One never knows when they are going to make a deal either with the Russian regime or with the Communist Party. I cannot see effective aids in the struggle against totalitarianism in the Tammany chieftains who endorsed a Communist candidate and who have no compunction in swallowing Bilbo.

The Popular Front Against Hitlerism failed because the Communists were loyal only to the Kremlin and the capitalists feared social reforms more than they feared fascism. The policy I am advocating is not a Popular Front of political parties but a kind of

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popular alliance, this time without the Communists and without organized capitalism, based primarily upon labor, the liberal intellectuals, professional and business men of democratic integrity, co-operators, farmers, and a youth not suborned by the fleshpots of commercial success. Without such an alliance I can see no prospects for democratic socialism. And even with such an alliance the odds are against victory. But they may be turned by intelligence, courage, and a little luck.

The day-by-day struggle for human decency and a better social order seems to me to be more important than the "ultimate" victory of a total program. Except in certain historical situations whose date cannot be forseen or prepared for, it seems to me unwise to jeopardize the chances for immediate piecemeal gains by staking everything on one effort for fundamental revolutionary change. To struggle for specific changes and reforms and at the same time to try to press back the tide of totalitarianism is difficult enough. It may succeed no better than hopeful illusions and hysterical fears. Yet, to be resigned to the contingency of defeat but to fight like hell for the best possible chance in every alternative is what the good life in action means. To triumph in a struggle at the cost of one's fundamental values is the height of vulgarity—and futility. It is no triumph at all. Even of Hitler we can say that he was degraded by the way he lived, not by the way he died. The future of democratic socialism is indeed uncertain and dark but not hopeless so long as political democratic processes are not destroyed. The responsibility for making it brighter, here and today and every day, is ours, not history's.

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A Distant Episode

PAUL BOWLES

THE SEPTEMBER sunsets were at their reddest the week the Professor decided to visit Aïn Tadouirt, which is in the warm country. He came down out of the high, flat region in the evening by bus, with two small overnight bags full of maps, sun lotions, and medicines. Ten years ago he had been in the village for three days; long enough, however, to establish a fairly firm friendship with a cafékeeper, who had written him several times during the first year after his visit, if never since. "Hassan Ramani," the Professor said over and over, as the bus bumped downward through ever warmer layers of air. Now facing the flaming sky in the west, and now facing the sharp mountains, the car followed the dusty trail down the canyons into air which began to smell of other things besides the endless ozone of the heights: orange blossoms, pepper, sun-baked excrement, burning olive oil, rotten fruit. He closed his eyes happily and lived for an instant in a purely olfactory world. The distant past returned—what part of it, he could not decide.

The chauffeur, whose seat the Professor shared, spoke to him without taking his eyes from the road. *"Vous êtes géologue?"*

"A geologist? Ah, no! I'm a linguist."

"There are no languages here. Only dialects."

"Exactly. I'm making a survey of variations on Moghrebi."

The chauffeur was scornful. "Keep on going south," he said. "You'll find some languages you never heard of before."

As they drove through the town gate, the usual swarm of urchins rose up out of the dust and ran screaming beside the bus. The Professor folded his dark glasses, put them in his pocket; and as soon as the vehicle had come to a standstill he jumped out, pushing his way through the indignant boys who clutched at his luggage in vain, and walked quickly into the Grand Hotel Saharien. Out of its eight rooms there were two available—one facing the market and the other, a smaller and cheaper one, giving onto a tiny yard full of refuse and barrels, where two gazelles wandered about. He took the smaller

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room, and pouring the entire pitcher of water into the tin basin, began to wash the grit from his face and ears. The afterglow was nearly gone from the sky, and the pinkness in objects was disappearing, almost as he watched. He lit the carbide lamp and winced at its odor.

After dinner the Professor walked slowly through the streets to Hassan Ramani's café, whose back room hung hazardously out above the river. The entrance was very low, and he had to bend down slightly to get in. A man was tending the fire. There was one guest sipping tea. The caouadji tried to make him take a seat at the other table in the front room, but the Professor walked airily ahead into the back room and sat down. The moon was shining through the reed latticework and there was not a sound outside but the occasional distant bark of a dog. He changed tables so he could see the river. It was dry, but there was a pool here and there that reflected the bright night sky. The caouadji came in and wiped off the table.

"Does this café still belong to Hassan Ramani?" he asked him in the Moghrebi he had taken four years to learn.

The man replied in bad French: "He is deceased."

"Deceased?" repeated the Professor, without noticing the absurdity of the word. "Really? When?"

"I don't know," said the caouadji. "One tea?"

"Yes. But I don't understand . . . "

The man was already out of the room, fanning the fire. The Professor sat still, feeling lonely, and arguing with himself that to do so was ridiculous. Soon the caouadji returned with the tea. He paid him and gave him an enormous tip, for which he received a grave bow.

"Tell me," he said, as the other started away. "Can one still get those little boxes made from camel udders?"

The man looked angry. "Sometimes the Chaamba bring in those things. We do not buy them here." Then insolently, in Arabic: "And why a camel-udder box?"

"Because I like them," retorted the Professor. And then because he was feeling a little exalted, he added, "I like them so much I want to make a collection of them, and I will pay you ten francs for every one you can get me."

"*Khamstache,*" said the caouadji, opening his left hand rapidly three times in succession.

"Never. Ten."

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"Not possible. But wait until later and come with me. You can give me what you like. And you will get camel-udder boxes if there are any."

He went out into the front room, leaving the Professor to drink his tea and listen to the growing chorus of dogs that barked and howled as the moon rose higher into the sky. A group of customers came into the front room and sat talking for an hour or so. When they had left, the caouadji put out the fire and stood in the doorway putting on his burnous. "Come," he said.

Outside in the street there was very little movement. The booths were all closed and the only light came from the moon. An occasional pedestrian passed, and grunted a brief greeting to the caouadji.

"Everyone knows you," said the Professor, to cut the silence between them.

"Yes."

"I wish everyone knew me," said the Professor, before he realized how infantile such a remark must sound.

"*No* one knows you," said his companion gruffly.

They had come to the other side of the town, on the promontory above the desert, and through a great rift in the wall the Professor saw the white endlessness, broken in the foreground by dark spots of oasis. They walked through the opening and followed a winding road between rocks, downward toward the nearest small forest of palms. The Professor thought: "He may cut my throat. But his café—he would surely be found out."

"Is it far?" he asked, casually.

"Are you tired?" countered the caouadji.

"They are expecting me back at the Hotel Saharien," he lied.

"You can't be there and here," said the caouadji.

The Professor laughed. He wondered if it sounded uneasy to the other.

"Have you owned Ramani's café long?"

"I work there for a friend." The reply made the Professor more unhappy than he had imagined it would.

"Oh. Will you work tomorrow?"

"That is impossible to say."

The Professor stumbled on a stone, and fell, scraping his hand. The caouadji said: "Be careful."

The sweet black odor of rotten meat hung in the air suddenly.

"Agh!" said the Professor, choking. "What is it?"

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The caouadji had covered his face with his burnous and did not answer. Soon the stench had been left behind. They were on flat ground. Ahead the path was bordered on each side by a high mud wall. There was no breeze and the palms were quite still, but behind the walls was the sound of running water. Also, the odor of human excrement was almost constant as they walked between the walls.

The Professor waited until he thought it seemed logical for him to ask with a certain degree of annoyance: "But where are we going?"

"Soon," said the guide, pausing to gather some stones in the ditch.

"Pick up some stones," he advised. "Here are bad dogs."

"Where?" asked the Professor, but he stooped and got three large ones with pointed edges.

They continued very quietly. The walls came to an end and the bright desert lay ahead. Nearby was a ruined marabout, with its tiny dome only half standing, and the front wall entirely destroyed. Behind it were clumps of stunted, useless palms. A dog came running crazily toward them on three legs. Not until it got quite close did the Professor hear its steady low growl. The caouadji let fly a large stone at it, striking it square in the muzzle. There was a strange snapping of jaws and the dog ran sideways in another direction, falling blindly against rocks and scrambling haphazardly about like an injured insect.

Turning off the road, they walked across the earth strewn with sharp stones, past the little ruin, through the trees, until they came to a place where the ground dropped abruptly away in front of them.

"It looks like a quarry," said the Professor, resorting to French for the word "quarry," whose Arabic equivalent he could not call to mind at the moment. The caouadji did not answer. Instead he stood still and turned his head, as if listening. And indeed, from somewhere down below, but very far below, came the faint sound of a low flute. The caouadji nodded his head slowly several times. Then he said: "The path begins here. You can see it well all the way. The rock is white and the moon is strong. So you can see well. I am going back now and sleep. It is late. You can give me what you like."

Standing there at the edge of the abyss which at each moment looked deeper, with the dark face of the caouadji framed in its moonlit burnous close to his own face, the Professor asked himself exactly what he felt. Indignation, curiosity, fear, perhaps, but most of all

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relief and the hope that this was not a trick, the hope that the caouadji would really leave him alone and turn back without him.

He stepped back a little from the edge, and fumbled in his pocket for a loose note, because he did not want to show his wallet. Fortunately there was a fifty franc bill there, which he took out and handed to the man. He knew the caouadji was pleased, and so he paid no attention when he heard him saying: "It is not enough. I have to walk a long way home and there are dogs. . . . "

"Thank you and good night," said the Professor, sitting down with his legs drawn up under him, and lighting a cigarette. He felt almost happy.

"Give me only one cigarette," pleaded the man.

"Of course," he said, a bit curtly, and he held up the pack.

The caouadji squatted close beside him. His face was not pleasant to see. "What is it?" thought the Professor, terrified again, as he held out his lighted cigarette toward him.

The man's eyes were almost closed. It was the most obvious registering of concentrated scheming the Professor had ever seen. When the second cigarette was burning, he ventured to say to the still squatting Arab: "What are you thinking about?"

The other drew on his cigarette deliberately, and seemed about to speak. Then his expression changed to one of satisfaction, but he did not speak. A cool wind had risen in the air, and the Professor shivered. The sound of the flute came up from the depths below at intervals, sometimes mingled with the scraping of nearby palm fronds one against the other. "These people are not primitives," the Professor found himself saying in his mind.

"Good," said the caouadji, rising slowly. "Keep your money. Fifty francs is enough. It is an honor." Then he went back into French: *"Ti n'as qu'à discendre, to' droit."* He spat, chuckled (or was the Professor hysterical?), and strode away quickly.

The Professor was in a state of nerves. He lit another cigarette, and found his lips moving automatically. They were saying: "Is this a situation or a predicament? This is ridiculous." He sat very still for several minutes, waiting for a sense of reality to come to him. He stretched out on the hard, cold ground and looked up at the moon. It was almost like looking straight at the sun. If he shifted his gaze a little at a time, he could make a string of weaker moons across the sky. "Incredible," he whispered. Then he sat up quickly and looked about. There was no guarantee that the caouadji really had gone back

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to town. He got to his feet and looked over the edge of the precipice. In the moonlight the bottom seemed miles away. And there was nothing to give it scale; not a tree, not a house, not a person. . . . He listened for the flute, and heard only the wind going by his ears. A sudden violent desire to run back to the road seized him, and he turned and looked in the direction the caouadji had taken. At the same time he felt softly of his wallet in his breast pocket. Then he spat over the edge of the cliff. Then he made water over it, and listened intently, like a child. This gave him the impetus to start down the path into the abyss. Curiously enough, he was not dizzy. But prudently he kept from peering to his right, over the edge. It was a steady and steep downward climb. The monotony of it put him into a frame of mind not unlike that which had been induced by the bus-ride. He was murmuring "Hassan Ramani" again, repeatedly and in rhythm. He stopped, furious with himself for the sinister overtones the name now suggested to him. He decided he was exhausted from the trip. "And the walk," he added.

He was now well down the gigantic cliff, but the moon, being directly overhead, gave as much light as ever. Only the wind was left behind, above, to wander among the trees, to blow through the dusty streets of Aïn Tadouirt, into the hall of the Grand Hotel Saharien, and under the door of his little room.

It occurred to him that he ought to ask himself why he was doing this irrational thing, but he was intelligent enough to know that since he was doing it, it was not so important to probe for explanations at that moment.

Suddenly the earth was flat beneath his feet. He had reached the bottom sooner than he had expected. He stepped ahead distrustfully still, as if he expected another treacherous drop. It was so hard to know in this uniform, dim brightness. Before he knew what had happened the dog was upon him, a heavy mass of fur trying to push him backwards, a sharp nail rubbing down his chest, a straining of muscles against him to get the teeth into his neck. The Professor thought: "I refuse to die this way." The dog fell back; it looked like an Eskimo dog. As it sprang again, he called out, very loud: "Ay!" It fell against him, there was a confusion of sensations and a pain somewhere. There was also the sound of voices very near to him, and he could not understand what they were saying. Something cold and metallic was pushed brutally against his spine as the dog still hung for a second by his teeth from a mass of clothing and perhaps

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flesh. The Professor knew it was a gun, and he raised his hands, shouting in Moghrebi: "Take away the dog!" But the gun merely pushed him forward, and since the dog, once it was back on the ground, did not leap again, he took a step ahead. The gun kept pushing; he kept taking steps. Again he heard voices, but the person directly behind him said nothing. People seemed to be running about; it sounded that way, at least. For his eyes, he discovered, were still shut tight against the dog's attack. He opened them. A group of men was advancing toward him. They were dressed in the black clothes of the Chaamba. "The Chaamba is a cloud across the face of the sun." "When the Chaamba appears the righteous man turns away." In how many shops and market places he had heard these maxims uttered banteringly among friends. Never to a Chaamba, to be sure, for these men do not frequent towns. They send a representative in disguise, to arrange with shady elements there for the disposal of captured goods. "An opportunity," he thought quickly, "of testing the accuracy of such statements." He did not doubt for a moment that the adventure would prove to be a kind of warning against such foolishness on his part—a warning which in retrospect would be half sinister, half farcical.

Two snarling dogs came running from behind the oncoming men and threw themselves at his legs. He was scandalized to note that no one paid any attention to this breach of etiquette. The gun pushed him harder as he tried to sidestep the animals' noisy assault. Again he cried: "The dogs! Take them away!" The gun shoved him forward with great force and he fell, almost at the feet of the crowd of men facing him. The dogs were wrenching at his hands and arms. A boot kicked them aside, yelping, and then with increased vigor it kicked the Professor in the hip. Then came a chorus of kicks from different sides, and he was rolled violently about on the earth for a while. During this time he was conscious of hands reaching into his pockets and removing everything from them. He tried to say: "You have all my money; stop kicking me!" But his bruised facial muscles would not work; he felt himself pouting, and that was all. Someone dealt him a terrific blow on the head, and he thought: "Now at least I shall lose consciousness, thank Heaven." Still he went on being aware of the guttural voices he could not understand, and of being bound tightly about the ankles and chest. Then there was black silence that opened like a wound from time to time, to let in the soft, deep notes of the flute playing the same succession of notes again

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and again. Suddenly he felt excruciating pain everywhere—pain and cold. "So I have been unconscious, after all," he thought. In spite of that, the present seemed only like a direct continuation of what had gone before.

It was growing faintly light. There were camels near where he was lying; he could hear their gurgling and their heavy breathing. He could not bring himself to attempt opening his eyes, just in case it should turn out to be impossible. However, when he heard someone approaching, he found that he had no difficulty in seeing.

The man looked at him dispassionately in the gray morning light. With one hand he pinched together the Professor's nostrils. When the Professor opened his mouth to breathe, the man swiftly seized his tongue and pulled on it with all his might. The Professor was gagging and catching his breath; he did not see what was happening. He could not distinguish the pain of the brutal yanking from that of the sharp knife. Then there was an endless choking and spitting that went on automatically, as though he were scarcely a part of it. The word "operation" kept going through his mind; it calmed his terror somewhat as he sank back into darkness.

The caravan left sometime toward midmorning. The Professor, not unconscious, but in a state of utter stupor, still gagging and drooling blood, was dumped doubled-up into a sack and tied at one side of a camel. The lower end of the enormous amphitheater contained a natural gate in the rocks. The meharis, lightly-laden beasts on this trip, passed through single-file, and slowly mounted the gentle slope that led up into the beginning of the desert. That night, at a stop behind some low hills, the men took him out, still in a state which permitted no thought, and over the dusty rags that remained of his clothing they fastened a series of curious belts made of the bottoms of tin cans strung together. One after another of these bright girdles was wired about his torso, his arms and legs, even across his face, until he was entirely within a suit of armor that covered him with its circular metal scales. There was a good deal of merriment during this decking-out of the Professor. One man brought out a flute and a younger one did a not ungraceful caricature of an Ouled Naïl executing a cane dance. The Professor was no longer conscious; to be exact, he existed in the middle of the movements made by these other men. When they had finished dressing him the way they wished him to look, they stuffed some food under the tin bangles hanging over his face. Even though he chewed mechanically, most of it eventually fell out

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onto the ground. They put him back into the sack and left him there.

Two days later they arrived at one of their own encampments. There were women and children here in the tents, and the men had to drive away the snarling dogs they had left there to guard them. When they emptied the Professor out of his sack, there were screams of fright, and it took several hours to convince the last woman that he was harmless, although there had been no doubt from the start that he was a valuable possession. After a few days they began to move on again, taking everything with them, and traveling only at night as the terrain grew warmer.

Even when all his wounds had healed and he felt no more pain, the Professor did not begin to think again; he ate and defecated, and he danced when he was bidden, a senseless hopping up and down that delighted the children, principally because of the wonderful jangling racket it made. And he generally slept through the heat of the day, in among the camels.

Wending its way southeast, the caravan avoided all stationary civilization. In a few weeks they reached a new plateau, wholly wild and with a sparse vegetation. Here they pitched camp and remained, while the meharis were turned loose to graze. Everyone was happy here; the weather was cooler and there was a well only a few hours away on a seldom-frequented trail. It was here they conceived the idea of taking the Professor to Fogara and selling him to the Touaregs.

It was a full year before they carried out this project. By this time the Professor was much better trained. He could do a handspring, make a series of fearful growling noises which had, nevertheless, a certain element of humor; and when the Chaamba removed the tin from his face they discovered he could grimace admirably while he danced. They also taught him a few basic obscene gestures which never failed to elicit delighted shrieks from the women. He was now brought forth only after especially abundant meals, when there was music and festivity. He easily fell in with their sense of ritual, and evolved an elementary sort of "program" to present when he was called forth: dancing, rolling on the ground, imitating certain animals, and finally rushing toward the group in feigned anger, to see the resultant confusion and hilarity.

When three of the men set out for Fogara with him, they took four meharis with them, and he rode astride his quite naturally. No

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precautions were taken to guard him, save that he was kept among them, one man always staying at the rear of the party. They came within sight of the walls at dawn, and they waited among the rocks all day. At dusk the youngest started out, and in three hours he returned with a friend who carried a stout cane. They tried to put the Professor through his routine then and there, but the man from Fogara was in a hurry to get back to town, so they all set out on the meharis.

In the town they went directly to the villager's home, where they had coffee in the courtyard sitting among the camels. Here the Professor went into his act again, and this time there was prolonged merriment and much rubbing together of hands. An agreement was reached, a sum of money paid, and the Chaamba withdrew, leaving the Professor in the house of the man with the cane, who did not delay in locking him into a tiny enclosure off the courtyard.

The next day was an important one in the Professor's life, for it was then that pain began to stir again in his being. A group of men came to the house, among whom was a venerable gentleman, better clothed than those others who spent their time flattering him, setting fervent kisses upon his hands and the edges of his garments. This person made a point of going into classical Arabic from time to time, to impress the others, who had not learned a word of the Koran. Thus his conversation would run more or less as follows: "Perhaps at In Salah. The French there are stupid. Celestial vengeance is approaching. Let us not hasten it. Praise the highest and cast thine anathema against idols. With paint on his face. In case the police wish to look close." The others listened and agreed, nodding their heads slowly and solemnly. And the Professor in his stall beside them listened, too. That is, he was *conscious* of the sound of the old man's Arabic. The words penetrated for the first time in many months. Noises, then: "Celestial vengeance is approaching." Then: "It is an honor. Fifty francs is enough. Keep your money. Good." And the caouadji squatting near him at the edge of the precipice. Then "anathema against idols" and more gibberish. He turned over panting on the sand and forgot about it. But the pain had begun. It operated in a kind of delirium, because he had begun to enter into consciousness again. When the man opened the door and prodded him with his cane, he cried out in a rage, and everyone laughed.

They got him onto his feet, but he would not dance. He stood before them, staring at the ground, stubbornly refusing to move. The

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owner was furious, and so annoyed by the laughter of the others that he felt obliged to send them away, saying that he would await a more propitious time for exhibiting his property, because he dared not show his anger before the elder. However, when they had left he dealt the Professor a violent blow on the shoulder with his cane, called him various obscene things, and went out into the street, slamming the gate behind him. He walked straight to the street of the Ouled Naïl, because he was sure of finding the Chaamba there among the girls, spending the money. And there in a tent he found one of them still abed, while an Ouled Naïl washed the tea glasses. He walked in and almost decapitated the man before the latter had even attempted to sit up. Then he threw his razor on the bed and ran out.

The Ouled Naïl saw the blood, screamed, ran out of her tent into the next, and soon emerged from that with four girls who rushed together into the coffee house and told the caouadji who had killed the Chaamba. It was only a matter of an hour before the French military police had caught him at a friend's house, and dragged him off to the barracks. That night the Professor had nothing to eat, and the next afternoon, in the slow sharpening of his consciousness caused by increasing hunger, he walked aimlessly about the courtyard and the rooms that gave onto it. There was no one. In one room a calendar hung on the wall. The Professor watched nervously, like a dog watching a fly in front of its nose. On the white paper were black objects that made sounds in his head. He heard them: *"Grande Epicerie du Sahel. Juin. Lundi, Mardi, Mercredi. . . ."*

The tiny inkmarks of which a symphony consists may have been made long ago, but when they are fulfilled in sound they become imminent and mighty. So a kind of music of feeling began to play in the Professor's head, increasing in volume as he looked at the mud wall, and he had the feeling that he was performing what had been written for him long ago. He felt like weeping; he felt like roaring through the little house, upsetting and smashing the few breakable objects. His motion got no further than this one overwhelming desire. So, bellowing as loud as he could, he attacked the house and its belongings. Then he attacked the door into the street, which resisted for a while and finally broke. He climbed through the opening made by the boards he had ripped apart, and still bellowing and shaking his arms in the air to make as loud a jangling as possible, he began to gallop along the quiet street toward the gateway of the town. A few people looked at him with great curiosity. As he passed

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the garage, the last building before the high mud archway that framed the desert beyond, a French soldier saw him. *"Tiens,"* he said to himself, "a holy maniac."

Again it was sunset time. The Professor ran beneath the arched gate, turned his face toward the red sky, and began to trot along the Piste d'In Salah, straight into the setting sun. Behind him, from the garage, the soldier took a pot shot at him for good luck. The bullet whistled dangerously near the Professor's head, and his yelling rose into an indignant lament as he waved his arms more wildly, and hopped high into the air at every few steps, in an access of terror.

The soldier watched a while, smiling, as the cavorting figure grew smaller in the oncoming evening darkness, and the rattling of the tin became a part of the great silence out there beyond the gate. The wall of the garage as he leaned against it still gave forth heat, left there by the sun, but even then the lunar chill was growing in the air.

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The Nest

GEORGES BLIN

Ecclesiasticus says not to rely on a man without a nest. And, actually, the nest is a good guarantee of bourgeois stability:[1] it offers a reassuring image of life staked out, unaspiring, riveted in the *home,* dedicated to the duties which perpetuate the family. All the rectitude of private life is concentrated here, and morality validates instinctual demands. Unlike the hearth which joins its group together in the observances of a cult, the nest, symbol of the secular community, conjures up those legitimate pleasures of tenderness, comfort, and intimacy which still preserve some domestic modesty. Yet this picture of the nest as, at the same time, both warm and chaste is really little more than an assumption, gilt-edged with hypocrisy, and, in practice, the attempted symbiosis supports some hideous equivocations. What one is hatching is one's own impurity.

Certainly those it shelters have a dangerous illusion of security. The dense matting, the walls of tangled thicket, the impenetrable wickerwork protect it sometimes: its slit mouth and its roof isolate it and save it from the menaces of the sky. Also, its habitat, well off the ground, high in the fork of a tree, enshrined among thorn bushes—when these are not, as Chateaubriand says, simple "curtains of verdure," drawn to insure the nest's privacy and natural modesty—staves off any attack, even indiscreet inquiry. Sometimes, for camouflage, by a mimesis which goes further than cunning, certain birds reduce their nests to the plant state from which they have taken the essential materials. And this very absence from danger is dangerous, for a nonchalance develops which is utterly alien to morality. The nest is a rest home, whereas an ethical life is tense, uneasy, chronically alert and sensitive to wrong. The person who no longer feels the threat of danger, and stands no more on his guard, becomes the victim of his inner demons. Furthermore, with the nest's guarantee of security there is no real reason to work, and, safe behind the

1. In fact, *nidus* is a cognate of *sideo*: the nest really is the place where one settles down.

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walls, one cultivates a taste for idleness and dreams: but morality is no friend of frank inertia, and is not even acquainted with the gratuitous.

Really secure people lose the faculty of self-observation; they do not "keep their distance"; they behave cynically to each other, that is, as if they were alone. Within this restricted group, cut off from the outside world by a wall as thick as a prison's, one acts before an audience of objects, any sense of other observers having disappeared. For the others, not being possible enemies, cease to play the judge, or even the spectator—one not only removes one's mask before them, but even forgets they are people: one identifies them by their function or by their place. At home, deportment and self-control are laid aside; one imagines that one has devoured one's relations' liberty and one mechanically treats them as permanent acquisitions, that is, in the possessive case. Outdoors, one keeps a sharp lookout; one keeps an eye on oneself, too, but inside the four walls which bound and protect the human nest, one drops the vigilance which safeguards purity: the Spirit lives only in the *qui-vive*.

The nest is safe only because it is so self-contained. Whether shaped as a cup or a funnel, a basin or a dome, a ball or a horn, it always assumes a circular (or spherical) form, and geometrically confers, by its concentric system, the advantages as well as the inconvenience of an absolute interiority. Nothing healthy can penetrate from the outside, nothing corrupt can escape from within. It is no mistake to think that the interior is more polluted than its shell, its camouflages or the open field. Outside the wind, the rain, the sun sweep, wash, dry the impurities. But the nest, so perfectly enclosed, asphyxiates, poisons itself. Shut and closed, it smells its own confinement. Its fastness oppresses as much as it protects, and those who live there, lost in feathers and down, barely escape suffocation. When an egg breaks, or a nestling dies, and there is no way to get them out, the rest of the brood has to grow up in this infected atmosphere. Then, too, according to the medieval Spanish romance, the bird often fouls her own nest. The wasp, the hoopee, the turtledove, the goldfinch never hesitate to ease themselves at home. Vultures store rodents and rotten fish in their aeries, where worms and obstinate weevils wrangle over them. Vermin are very fond of a warm brood. And sometimes it looks as if the nest likes to distinguish itself by certain odors of excrement, make a name for itself with its festering cup.

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One imagines all kinds of suspicious things in this anxiety to escape from the open air. But then shady business usually goes underground. Depth, being the image of the superior protection, has acquired an even worse reputation for itself than simple interiority: hell and the cesspool are preferably located somewhere below the basement. Intimacy is always erotic; the secret, guilty. What is hidden is vice. The utility of the folding screen. Immoral can be defined as whatever escapes the eye. Shame hides from sight, from which one infers that concealment has some cause for shame. Parents know very well that children only disappear to make trouble. The man wandering at night through the streets imagines, as he watches the light filter through the closed shutters, that every obstacle masks an orgy, or, at least, some illicit delight. And Baudelaire, in the *Fleurs du Mal,* describes the shutters as the *abri des secretes luxures.* "Clandestine" s connotations of guilt are a late development. What fine security there is for an impropriety in a cushioned alcove with the curtains pulled! And what impunity, what service to temptation the double lock and the firm door give! In places with a fastener on the door (bathhouses, Rimbaud's w.c.'s, private rooms) one plays most readily with certain suggestions. The work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau is charged with sensuality, with the imagination of the *retreat.* And it is really its obscurity which gives the nest a strange rankness. Crimes are plotted in darkness, and if the den and the dark corner are exposed to broad daylight, they lose their powers of defense.

Italian gives *morbido* a sense of gentleness, noting thus that relations which are too delicate tend to encourage sick and troubled feelings. On this account, one might guess that the nest, feathered and furred, fleecy, downy, and silken, feminizes and destroys the moral principles exposed to its cozy warmth. The moss, grasses, wadding, soft fibers, gum, and sticky stems combine to increase whatever is soft and gentle, as, indeed, the human nest, padded, fluffed, with hangings, thick carpets, eiderdown bolsters, fringes, overstuffing, and furs generates a voluptuous fever highly propitious to every disorder.

Surely you must agree that the nest is concocted so as to procure a maximum of warmth. Otherwise, neither the germ of the egg develops, nor can the brood, generally born naked, hope to survive. But who thinks that morality weighs its decisions in the steamroom or the Turkish bath? The morals of the hottest countries are, reputedly, the most relaxed. Winter is not Aphrodite's season, and there has to be a certain temperature, say that of the bed, to promote an

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erection.[2] Impotent men who find themselves, on those "triumphant mornings" which the poet mentions, ready to attack upon awakening are well aware of this: their body, under the covers in a hard, fast sleep, has been hatching its eggs. Ethics is opposed to all warmth—even the warmth of passion, because warmth fatally paralyzes the conscience. How can a man in this torpid comfort decide to withdraw from himself? Heat makes no distinctions: it neither judges nor condemns. And in the nest, so mild and warm, even the sense of one's own limits is lost: one uses, instinctively, someone else's, and asks no questions. It is the mutual temperature of two people in bed which is so obscene: who can doubt what "to sleep with somebody" means?

Since it is saturated with the smell of sweat and damp, the warmth of the nest takes on a rather unhealthy character. The clamminess is the more repellant for the fever which it usually accompanies: the shaking, blushing bodies of newly hatched young are a disagreeable and sickly sight. This pathological factor is caught in the two meanings of "incubate." The mother hatches her eggs as we hatch a disease or a plot or a germ in the culture broth. The germ of an egg requires the same conditions of warmth as the toxic germ of microbe world. Now, the hearth is a hotbed of infection. But another haunt of contagion is the nest. To contaminate someone is, in an etymological sense, to make contact with him; and certainly the warmth of the womb and the nest is that of animal adherence and body against body. Sickness takes its victims one by one: it runs through a family. And the terrible thing in the brood's case is that there is no missing link: the perfectly contained nest distills its miasmas and spreads its poisons forever.

Everything considered, we might say that promiscuity is really to blame for this impurity. The nest is a mold of the bird himself, who, turning round and round, swelling his chest and pressing against his circular confines, is from head to foot the measure of his "home." Whoever lives with him finds the space already filled, moves into square feet previously captured and ably defended. The house of anyone else is that other person's body and indeed his actual self. And, therefore, cohabitation is equivocal from the start, and ends in concubinage. The nest stands for many more things than a couple's privacy. It relates them to all coexistent couples. And this seems to increase and multiply its immorality. For joint pleasure with its complacence, its very complicity, is much worse. Every pleasure that one

2. In Italian the familiar word for bed is *nido*.

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shares (the term itself is inappropriate) is a multiplied mistake. Even enjoyment with just a touch of collective character—say a society of innocent gourmets—is heading for trouble, and guiltier concerts are in the offing.

The sickness is in the surrender of principles. Can you count the crimes of day-to-day promiscuity? Of those open but unmentioned things held back from the "common" life—of that itching, those temptations which provoke domestic friction? Are any familiarities barred in the family? And once in the family, out with the dirty linen, as cleanliness is to be reserved for strangers. A man allows himself any number of privacies in his private life, his private bath (or his privy). What facilities can rival those of the home for free concupiscence? The first thing a man does when he gets home is undo the buttons which morality prescribes to keep his body in check. The clothing for the home is the dishabille. And what opportunities beckon in those wrappers that hide nothing, those half-open doors, those glimpses, possibly accidental, of the rites of the washbasin or the dressing-table; the domesticated man has a thousand excuses to enter bedrooms and more intimate quarters that belong to somebody else. The young girls painted by Greuze offer a sublime illustration of the immodesty which domestic trust and simplicity encourage: the eroticism of the unadjusted negligee, of full bosoms in bursting bodices, transparent underwear, suspiciously moist skin, childish naked parts trembling in tender embraces. That smoldering canvas in the Louvre: two *friends* or "two sisters"? And of what do Greuze's mothers dream, those women with swooning eyes, with breasts bared to children visibly too big to be fed? Incest is first imagined or consummated, of course, in the nest. The sexual initiation of children usually takes place there, also. "Inside" there is no dressing up: father and son learn to admire a ripening daughter or a sensuous new development in a sister. If a family grows, and its shelter stays as it was, won't its members be literally thrown on top of one another? Children, whether they want to or not, assist at their parents' special game, distinguish its echoes, and form collections of allusions to it. And, naturally, the servants have their role: even though their presence counts for nothing, they cannot refuse to participate. Children usually pick up the essential gestures of love from their nurses. One knows, for instance, that old recipe of nurses for calming squalling babies: manipulate their sexual organs. Freud and Havelock Ellis have shown that governesses, exploiting the opportunities offered by bathing, undressing, or sleeping together, can scarcely resist the temptation of the children entrusted

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to their care. Anyone who has not experienced this can refer to chapter eleven in *Gargantua.*

The pure is that which is unmixed. Confusion leads invariably to moral confusion. And the nest is singularly pell-mell in its overloaded condition. For that matter, the Spanish word *cerrado* significantly links the idea of closed places and interior compression. To economize space, the nestlings are jammed into the nest, squeezed against each other, doubled up and huddled together. A subway car in the rush hour is a human nest in the same predicament: bodies so imbricated and dovetailed as to form an inextricable system: the breaths blending with the perfumes: and it all seems very warm and homogenous, indeed. Here the *approach* is unnecessary, and the introduction, and the transitions (a hazard always in the maiden days of love). No retreat either for the man who would like to backtrack once he feels sure of success. Contact is inevitable, and who can say whether that hand *must* fall there, or whether it does so by design. Who can tell? But morality, with its brand of bourgeois analysis, tries to slide out of the implicit, to understand the reasons, to get rid of "complexes," and, in short, to unravel the plot.

In conclusion, one may note that even the most modest psychoanalytic opinion finds fault with the structure of the nest. The latter is really the image of a lukewarm cavity, soft and hairy, which haunts the mind of every male. The nest is first the womb, then the lap, always the receptacle, the container, the mold, and the first form. Everything about it whispers love and not for reproduction only. A call of a sexual nature, an internal, psychological summons arouses the bird when spring comes, and impels him to build. But here precisely is felt the terrible ambiguity of the hatching period, taken as an intermediary act between sexual and maternal love. The major impurity of the nest is one for which every female must answer: it is that of a being in whom tenderness is inseparable from sexual solicitation. Poised like a keel atop her eggs, the bird—who is brooding her own ovarian grapeshot—does not distinguish her pleasure from her most sacred duty. Fix-eyed, beatified, plunged into the pure present of her own satisfaction, the brooder asks no more than the pleasure of resting her belly and smarting organs, sore and red from the bloody mess, on the cool eggshells, heedless whether they are painted wood or plaster. With certain species like the grouse the maternal pleasure is so great that the bird lets herself be captured in her nest. And then there is the breast which assumes the double duty of whetting sexual pleasure and assuring the life of infants. Atrocious

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ambivalence, piously reaffirmed. For rather than accept the fact that duty can be a form of ingratitude, we support the scandalous duplicity on which the family is founded. We cannot push our moral hygiene so far as to reject and openly disown this attitude, the residue of former pleasure the very thought of which now shocks us. But perhaps a little rebellious purity lingers in the instinct which makes the most manly little boys tear up nests after they have robbed them.

(*Translated by Bowden Broadwater*)

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Poetry

OPERA, OPERA!

What work is that?
An Investigator speaks:

"It had been discovered that lenses
Of opera-glasses could not be controlled;
They had been cased in mother-of-pearl
And jewelers called them 'a scientific work of art,'
Glittering to look at in the fluorescent glare
Of a salesman's eye, but when one touched them
The hand became unsteady,
and the sight
(If one saw anything at all)
Became unnaturally clear.

A box-holder reported
That he saw Valkyrie riding through the lens,
That he could count October falling tears
Of Orpheus raining in a painted forest
Through autumn leaves and papier mâché towers—
Gray twilight billowing in canvas skies—
He said he could almost hear the chiming choirs
Of angels with tinseled hair and violet wings
Who gazed at heaven with mediterranean eyes,
That when the lens
Pierced the asbestos curtain,
At last he knew that something had gone wrong.

The lens showed Parsifal
And hairy legs and arms wrapped in a bathrobe:

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He saw the hero stir
Patented headache powders in a cup;
In the Green Room he saw
The woman who was once Eurydice,
Naked as Eve with Adam at her side,
Kiss the reflection of her lips within a mirror.
It was then he noticed that the house was empty,
That the galleries were dark and all the faces gone.
He gave five dollars to a night watchman
Who unlocked an exit, who hailed a cab
And took him home.

Another victim
Said that the lens viewed nothing but history:
Torn volumes of civil law and economics,
Rocks among blackened stumps of trees,
Foreshortened deserts and a broken cornice
Where someone carved:
'Voice of the people is the Voice of God—Hail Caesar!'

Another said
That the glasses had been given to a child
Who hoped to see a ball field in the park
Green as a billiard table, but grew impatient,
Lifted the lens at bedside to the moon
And through a window saw concentric circles
Wheel into a gray sphere with night unrolled behind it;
The boy cried, 'That thing is the face of death,'
Nor could he find his own elusive star.

It was decided
That the glasses had betrayed the universe,
That the view within the lens was both too near, too far:
If the glasses were 'a work of art'
They should be destroyed, but if 'scientific'
The valuable lenses could be brought
Almost to perfection, refined, repolished for expert use
Among ourselves, among our friends and enemies
In restless peace and all-pervading war."

HORACE GREGORY

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ARGUMENT

Days that cannot bring you near
or will not,
Distance trying to appear
something more than obstinate,
argue argue argue with me
endlessly,
neither proving you less wanted nor less dear.

Distance: Remember all that land
beneath the plane;
that coastline
of dim beaches deep in sand
stretching indistinguishably
all the way,
all the way to where my reasons end?

Days: And think
of all those cluttered instruments,
one to a fact,
canceling each other's experience;
how they were
like some hideous calendar
'Compliments of Never & Forever, Inc.'

The intimidating sound
of these voices
we must separately find
can and shall be vanquished:
Days and Distance disarrayed again
and gone
both for good and from the gentle battleground.

ELIZABETH BISHOP

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Homage to Paul Klee

ANDRÉ MASSON

BECAUSE it had the rare gift of a princely simplicity, the work of Paul Klee is referred to as esoteric. So it has its place in the well-hidden order of spiritual values.

A man of culture, a musician, he dealt, too, with ideas (what was communicable of a secret, he communicated, nor did he scorn to teach); his travels in the Far East and in Sicily were revelations of the quality of his spirit.

His work is as difficult to place in the common context of a school or group as that of a Vuillard or a Rouault.

Although alone, he was nevertheless indefatigably curious about the findings of his contemporaries, but so distinctly was he separated from them that his place on the map of art is similar to those islands of Captain Cook, who, having left signposts upon departing, was never quite sure what he would find upon his return. Judgment cannot venture here immoderately, and prudence is indispensable.

In regard to Klee, criticism is generally perplexed. Preferring to avoid it, we are almost compelled to claim, to infer from the slight form of his works that "These are only postage stamps." But precisely, Klee made no effort to conceal it from us; he entitled one of his most characteristic works *A Little World*. He was not impressed by the thesis of the postage stamp; he was one of those who, with William Blake, agreed that energy has few affinities with dimension and who are ready to maintain that to lay waste Great Britain the malice of the flea is equal to the stature of the horse.

He only illustrated one book, as far as I know, a novel by Voltaire. This as reservedly as possible, which is surely the highest achievement for the illustrator.

In addition to his paintings and drawings, the number of his prints is considerable.

Klee's "little world" seems to me almost a snare. Let us make no mistake; if the painter sometimes resorts to drawing like a child

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(I shall come back to this) more often his work is identified with the imperial or sacred arts. If we stick to the reassuring game of affinities, we are more likely to get our bearings at the sarcophagus at Memphis, in the ancient Peruvian fabrics, or in those, more congenial, of the Copts. The world of Klee had to be charged with a past—a very remote past—as if it felt itself unable to cope with the greenness and massivity of the present, unable to precede the wear of the centuries, to wear itself out before. . . . For a moment it would be tempting to see here too the elegance of Brummel, who put his ties into a file before he wore them. But this would be losing ourselves in romance. Rather, we ought to try to define his conception of space.

Henri Michaux, not without humor, writes about the paintings of a school, up to now considered the most emancipated in respect to visual servitude, that "It is well known, that we can't see there for more than a couple of yards." On the contrary, what Klee sought was the boundless. As early as 1912, uniting in his style the longing for the infinite of the Chinese and certain romantics of the North, from whom he descended, he wanted to check the too rational horizon. The beetle's graceful antenna would be enough to measure the desert, and the pollen's wake could humble the Milky Way. . . . Just as each one of us knows that the body of a chosen woman is, for him alone, the map of heaven; so we have, too, Renoir's nymphs who are, completely, the landscape.

Paul Klee admired Henri Matisse and it is understandable; the violences of early fauvism were necessary. Thanks to Matisse, we have won a more profound liberty. We can glimpse a transmutation, that of proportions, to which an open space corresponds, and a new ideography, perhaps a desperate movement, but doubtless the only one possible for the Western painter. For we have to go to the evidence; we cannot go on like the old masters. Nothing can bridge the gap. The phrase attributed to Cézanne, acknowledging himself the primitive in the discovery of a new way, is almost incredible; such lucidity is astonishing! A recent occurrence is another excessive witness: the speculators counterfeited *La Source*[1] with such perfection that it was questioned, and finally suspicion covered both works. We have the proof also (but do we need it?) that Vermeer's art today is only rivaled (apparently) by forgers.

Paul Klee turned then to his own means, to an alchemy all his own, or used the means of his time to express this liberated space. He

1. Painting by Ingres—*Translator.*

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went to the point of using the method of pointillism—Seurat's—but made it, again, his own. In 1931 the exquisite *Diana* appeared, and the moment of perfection came in 1937 with the *Classical Coast,* a masterpiece.

Haven't we seen it, don't we still see it in these pictures oozing tedium—waxed canvases of morgues—adorned with titles having little or no relation to them: Aristolochus leaning toward the East, polyhedrons stripped naked by Louis the Second of Bavaria, beaten dogs devoted to nonexistent footpaths? With Paul Klee as with no one else, a courteous harmony is established between the painter, the painting, and the spectator. What he proposes, he shows to us, and, when he alludes to the human face, he is scrupulous to the point of calling *mask* what is mask, *mirage* what is mirage, and *chimera* what is chimera. But his inclination to contemplation and exile did not allow him to forget the time in which he lived, and its monsters. So we have the *Mask of Fear* (1932) (isn't it really the greatest?) and those of the war.[2] The monsters were well chosen; *Overburdened Devils, Moon Goddess of the Barbarians, Timid Brute, Relapse of a Convert* (1939).

When Klee returned to the world of childhood for his theme,[3] he used graffito, and the unsophisticated draftsmanship of his models that he found suitable. His sensibility was never deceived; I have seen some of his drawings "made after nature" and they are in no way inferior to his "imaginative" works.

He sought the boundless, but his pictorial methods had their limits and he knew it. To make a comparison in another field—also his—music, we can say that his inspiration turned more to the possibilities of chamber music than of symphony. We can see him working more comfortably among the Persian painters than on the scaffoldings of the Sistine, but since he knew his range and held to it, since he believed that the artist's dignity depended upon fulfilling himself, and since Klee's work is a work fulfilled, this homage is given without reserve.

(*Translated by George Schloss*)

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2. Hemingway once: "The books say the infantry is queen of battle, but we know very well that it's fear." Hemingway owns one of Klee's important works.

3. For example: *Children Arrive at the City, Schoolgirl,* and the admirable *Child Consecrated to Suffering,* of 1934.

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Theater Chronicle

GERONTION

HENRY VIII. *By William Shakespeare and John Fletcher. International Theater.*

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN. *By Henrik Ibsen. International Theater.*

LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN. *By Oscar Wilde. Cort Theater.*

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI. *By John Webster. Ethel Barrymore Theater.*

NO EXIT. *By Jean-Paul Sartre. Biltmore Theater.*

THE G.I.'s have gone home and Broadway is at peace. The Rolls Royces of former days like large perambulators gently deposit their muffled elderly couples before the lighted marquees; the noise of the big musicals is drowned in the spoken word, and, taking advantage of this general atmosphere of armistice, culture emerges from its wartime shelter—Oscar Wilde and Eva Le Gallienne find the enemy departed.

For the first time in many years, the New York theater-goer this season can step into almost any theater lobby with that sense of virtuous expectation, of responsibility and enlightenment, that the drama peculiarly awakes and that makes the theater for New York what the café is for Paris, a pleasure and also a pride, a habit and a ritual, a diversion and a duty. To the extent that America has any communal life at all, it is centered in the New York theater; here is the last refuge of sociability and humanism—the ordinary middling man, who has given up nearly all universal pretensions, still considers himself a competent judge of acting and a competent critic of plays. The movies annihilate him in their darkness and do not ask his opinion; the symphony is over his head, and if he participates at all in it, it is with the largest and limpest of his emotions. Only the theater can he approach with his faculties alert and unabashed; he sees it as a kind of courtroom and himself as a qualified juror whose verdict is, from moment to moment, solicited.

This little arena of judgment was commandeered by the war. Despoiled of its provincialism, which was a necessity to its mood and its identity, the theater became a great barracks and entertained the boys from Arkansas and Minnesota with imitation movies (*Winged Victory, Lady in the Dark, The Eve of St. Mark*), pasted-up magazine stories (*Junior Miss, My Sister Eileen, Life With Father*), and high-salaried burlesque shows. The sound of talk, which since the eighteenth century

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has been the normal tone of the drama, the tone, that is, of rational intercourse, was seldom heard, and though there were revivals of classics, these classics were, for the most part (*Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, The Tempest*), staples of the high-school curriculum which were free from the minority taint. Chekhov, possibly because of the interest in Russia, was visible in three productions; Shaw in two, I believe, and the second of these, *Pygmalion,* was, from most people's point of view, a stage version of a movie.

Demobilized, the theater has returned to its antique habits with fresh energy. The old boxlike stage is back, confining its group of people to the limits of a single room; the interest in the mechanics of production (the revolving stage, the stage on different levels, the use of a movie screen, the use of a loudspeaker) has been replaced by an interest in the details of costume and *décor* or else by an interest in acting: Lady Windermere's fan becomes an *objet de virtu* as powerful as Desdemona's handkerchief; on the other hand, Maxwell Anderson does a play about Joan of Arc which declines to avail itself of the medieval license for pageantry, but uses a bare rehearsal stage and makes a corselet or a helmet do for a full suit of armor. Except in the neighborhood of Moss Hart and Lillian Hellman, there is everywhere in the theater this season a sense of restored dignity, of limitations accepted and formal conventions embraced. The return of O'Neill and George Kelly and the predominance of revivals sets the tone; it is an old man's season, garrulous, unsentimental, reasonable, pessimistic, and, in the manner of Lear and the late Yeats, contradictory, wilful, and adventurous.

The list of revivals this fall is as eccentric as an old man's reading. *John Gabriel Borkman, Henry VIII, Lady Windermere's Fan, The Duchess of Malfi, The Playboy of the Western World, Cyrano de Bergerac*—what a bizarre assortment, yet they all, with the exception of *The Playboy,* which is a recognized favorite, have something in common. They are all curios. Minor works of an established author, like *Borkman* or *Henry VIII,* or *Lady Windermere's Fan* (*The Importance of Being Earnest* is the classic), major work of an author who is out of fashion (*Cyrano de Bergerac*), major work of an author who is unknown to the public at large (*The Duchess of Malfi*), they represent collectively a certain hardihood on the part of their producers. Unfortunately, like a number of other neglected works, most of them are not very good.

Of *Henry VIII,* the American Repertory Theater made it impossible to form a literary opinion, for between the text and the audience Miss Le Gallienne and Miss Margaret Webster, the co-sponsors of this project, laid down a barrage of dust: dirty costumes which seemed to have been bought complete from a theatrical warehouse flapped across the stage, windily reciting lines; the Field of the Cloth of Gold was badly tarnished. This production had a pathos of its own, and Miss Le

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Gallienne, playing Katharine of Aragon, suggested a tragedy queen whom the public as well as her husband had long misunderstood.

John Gabriel Borkman, revived by the same group, had the advantage of fresher costumes and the weariness of the acting did not so sharply distinguish itself from the matter of the play. The play is a debilitated *Peer Gynt,* another study of the self-isolated superior man who loses his humanity in an abstract passion for excellence. Borkman embezzles money, confusing this crime with his destiny; he returns from prison to his bourgeois home a pariah and a god. The action of the play is over before the curtain rises, yet it thrashes about the stage, questioning, demanding, recalling, as impotently as old Borkman in his chamber, and finally, in a last spurt of the will, it moves from realism into symbolism and drags itself with its hero out onto a crag to die. This work might have seemed a little more substantial had Miss Webster and Miss Le Gallienne, respectively playing Borkman's wife and his sister-in-law, dropped the airs of Cassandra, the antiphonal responses, the glare of prophecy, and asked themselves, for a single instant, what a Norwegian housewife was like.

Lady Windermere's Fan, in contrast, is as pretty and professional as a box of French chocolates. The Cecil Beaton sets have the succulent vulgarity of a Wilde epigram; the ladies' costumes seem to have been dipped in those vegetable dyes used for frostings and are as dainty and miraculous as if they were squeezed out of a pastry-tube. The play, too, is like some expensive confection, hard and shiny on the outside and soft and runny at the center. Wilde, as an author, did not have the courage of his convictions. The cruelty and cynicism of the dialogue is quickly atoned for by the virtuous sentimentalism of the plot, and what begins as a monstrous study of the initiation of a strictly brought-up young wife into the profligate realities of London society becomes not a comedy but a rather shoddy melodrama in which there is no vice but only scandal, and the mysterious bad woman turns out to be the heroine's unfortunate mother. Before the plot, however, has been rectified to suit the conventional morality that the dialogue affects to disdain, there is one truthful and shocking scene, played by Penelope Ward and Henry Daniell, in which the young wife, learning of her husband's infidelity, hardens her own heart. And though it later appears that the husband was not *really* unfaithful, the memory of Miss Ward's acting leaves the audience unconvinced: the transition between innocence and knowledge she has made as terrible as death.

The Duchess of Malfi has been modernized by W. H. Auden. The effect of the poet's alterations has been to date the play more securely than history had yet done. He has made it into a period-piece, accentuating its peculiarities by adding horrors and pathos of his own: dead bodies fall out of armoires where wax effigies were shown through a

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curtain in the original; a child is made the witness of his father's death, where an adult companion was used by Webster; the incest theme is openly stated and at a particularly harrowing moment, where in Webster it is altogether hidden; the *Lyke Wake Dirge,* a death chant of the early Tudor period, is introduced to heap the terror of medieval superstition upon the barbarism of the Renaissance; and, finally, the selection of Canada Lee, a Negro in white-face, to play Bosola, goes in the same direction as these other improvements, though it may not have come from Auden: that is, it directs this tragedy of blood and passion toward the ghoulish, the unnatural, the perverse. Auden's *Duchess* is more Gothic than Jacobean; from this springs a gain in pace and intensity and a loss of somber seriousness. What is missing from the Auden-Elizabeth Bergner version is a certain hardness and realism, a sense of character that is more modern than Shakespeare's, if less poetic. The Webster Duchess of Malfi is an advance over Ophelia, on the one hand, and Lady Macbeth, on the other; she is, in fact, the transition, the connection, between these two women; she is the whole world of ordinary women, of which they are but the poles. Unfortunately, Miss Bergner's acting, while admirable for the tragic scenes, is too heavy for the everyday ones; furthermore, the cutting done by Auden, while it enhances the Duchess's plight as the play's victim, misunderstands her character by making her its dead center. Similarly, the character of Bosola is brutalized by Canada Lee's acting; this man, in Webster, is a fiend only in the sense that every shrewd, purchasable man is a fiend; unlike Iago, he has a heart; he has scruples; he can be shocked—he is not a nature-devil.

If these four plays in the aggregate constitute an aberration from some norm of choice, they each individually in their subject matter contemplate an aberration from some norm of conduct. There is the incest theme in *The Duchess of Malfi*; in *Lady Windermere's Fan,* the relations between mother and daughter do violence to family feeling, and there is a suggestion throughout, which gives the play a certain spice, that the husband is going from the daughter's bed to the mother's as regularly as he would go to his club. In *John Gabriel Borkman* twin sisters are fighting for the possession of a father and a son; the domestic history of *Henry VIII* is well known, and even in *Cyrano de Bergerac,* which I have not seen, there is the pronounced aberration of the nose, which cuts the hero off from the norm of love and marriage.

It is as if in the closed room of the theater a morbid situation had suddenly been discovered; the drama, returning to the individual instance, finds him poisoned in the library. This predicament is not new to the novel, but the drama, which is concerned with action and hence with health, which gives the ability to act, has been obliged to look at its borders, in the works of its minor writers, its aging writers, its great

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writers temporarily impotent, to find the contemporary mood. That this mood is also a fashion does not deprive it of significance; there are patients who boast of their symptoms who are nevertheless ill; the theater, of all the arts, has, with its parochial, sheltered, and rather high-minded and unfashionable audience, been the last to succumb to the mode of the morbid and the perverse. The fact that it now does so is perhaps an index of the world's extremity, another example of which is to be found in the play of Sartre, *Huis Clos*, produced in New York under the title *No Exit*. Here a modernist philosopher, to present his view of the modernist predicament (the damned soul in the locked room), resorts to the most ancient theatrical methods. A collaborationist who is really a coward, a society woman who is really a murderess, and a lesbian who is really a sadist die and go to hell, which they find is simply a hotel room where their own characters hold them prisoner as in life. Of this play, however apt its subject, it need only be said that M. Sartre's sense of sin is rudimentary. The crimes his characters confess to are so crude as to appear innocent and artless—a clergyman in the course of a five-minute solitary walk commits sins graver, more multifarious, more subtle, than are dreamed of in M. Sartre's philosophy. Only in the acting of Ruth Ford can a glimpse of evil be caught. She endows the society girl with a rattling silliness and vanity that is surely more repugnant to God than the infanticide M. Sartre ascribes to her. Those older writers, who were not existentialists, had, even in their failing moments, a less journalistic sense of the horror of existence.

MARY MCCARTHY

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MODERN EVIDENCE

Essay on the Puppet Theater*

HEINRICH VON KLEIST

WHILE PASSING the winter of 1801 in M., I met one evening, in a public park, Mr. C., who, a short time before, had been engaged in this town as leading dancer at the opera, where the public had given him an extraordinary welcome.

I told him of my astonishment at having noticed him several times at a Punch-and-Judy show, which had been set up on the market place, and which delighted the people with little dramatic burlesques, interwoven with songs and dances.

He assured me that the pantomimic art of these puppets had given him much pleasure, making it quite plain that a dancer who wanted to develop himself could learn many things from them.

Since this utterance, by the manner in which it was made, seemed to me more than mere fancy, I sat down beside him to question him at some length about his reasons. He asked me whether I would not agree that the movement of the puppets, particularly of the smaller ones, was exceedingly graceful. I could not deny that this was so, and that I had seen a group of four dancing a roundelay in peasant fashion that could not be improved upon even in a drawing by Teniers.

I then made inquiries about the mechanism of these figures, and asked him how it was possible—without having myriads of strings attached to one's fingers—to direct each limb and all of its parts, the way the rhythm of the dance required it.

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* EDITOR'S NOTE:—Heinrich von Kleist, who was born in 1777 and committed suicide in 1811, is one of the most important of German dramatists and fiction writers. In such dramas as *Penthesilea, Das Kätchen von Heilbronn, Prinz Friedrich von Homburg,* and in such long stories as *Michael Kohlhaas* he succeeded in finding objective forms for violent emotions and obsessive ideas. Among the writers influenced by the austerity and strict narrative line of his prose is Franz Kafka. Nietzsche said of Kleist that he was a profoundly tragic poet who dealt with "the incurable part of nature." His "Essay on the Puppet Theater" is generally considered by German critics and historians of literature to be one of the finest essays in their language.

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He advised me not to imagine that each limb was placed and manipulated singly by the puppeteer during the various moments of the dance. Each movement, he said, has a center of gravity; it would suffice to direct it in the inside of the figure; the limbs, which are nothing but pendula, follow mechanically without anyone's aid. He added that this movement was very simple, that each time, when the center of gravity moved in a straight line, the limbs were beginning to follow a curve, and that often, when shaken accidentally, the whole thing was swept along in a kind of rhythmic movement which resembled the dance.

This remark seemed to me to throw some light on the pleasure which he pretended to find in the marionette theater. Meanwhile I did not yet suspect the consequences he would draw from it later on.

I asked him if he believed that the puppeteer who directed these figures was himself a dancer, or at least if he did not have to have some idea of the beautiful in the dance.

He replied that, though a thing might be easy in a mechanical sense, we could not necessarily deduce from that that it could be manipulated entirely without sensation. The line which the center of gravity had to describe was, to be sure, very simple, and, in his opinion, mostly straight. In cases where it is crooked, the law of its curvature is at least of the first or, at best, second order, and also in this last case only elliptical; which form of movement, he said, was natural for the extremities of the human body, on account of the joints, and therefore it did not require much art for the puppeteer to describe it. On the other hand, this line would remain something very mysterious. For it was nothing other than the road taken by the soul of the dancer, and he doubted if it could be found otherwise than through the fact that the puppeteer placed himself in the center of gravity of the puppet; in other words, that he danced.

I answered that the puppeteer's job had been represented to me as something rather dull, somewhat like the turning of a handle when one is playing the hurdy-gurdy.

"Not at all," he replied, "on the contrary, the movements of his fingers are in somewhat artificial relationship to those of the puppets, which are attached to them, comparable to those of numbers to their logarithms, or the asymptotes to the hyperbola." He expressed the belief that this last-mentioned vestige of the mind could also eventually be removed from the marionettes, that their dance could pass entirely into the world of the mechanical and be produced

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by means of a handle, just the way I had imagined it.

I expressed my astonishment, for I was struck that he should have considered this game, invented for the mob, worthy of a beautiful art. Not only that he should believe it capable of a higher evolution, but also that he himself seemed to be occupied with it.

He smiled, saying that he dared assert that if a mechanic would construct a marionette according to his requirements, he would present a dance with it, which neither he nor any good dancer of his time, including Vestris, could equal.

"Have you ever heard," he said, while I looked silently at the floor, "of those mechanical legs which English artists manufacture for unfortunate people who have lost theirs?" I said—no, I had never seen such things. "I am sorry," he replied, "for if I tell you that these unfortunate people dance with them, to be sure, I am almost afraid you will not believe me. What am I saying, dance? The sphere of their movements is rather limited, but those that are at their command develop with a tranquillity, lightness, and grace which astonishes every thinking mind."

I said jestingly that in this way he had what he was looking for. For the artist who is able to construct such a strange leg would doubtless be able to produce a whole group of puppets for him, according to his requirements. "Now what," I asked, as I saw him also looking down, somewhat embarrassed, "what are these requirements you make of his skill?"

"Nothing," he replied, "except what I have already found here: symmetry, mobility, lightness; only all that in a higher degree and especially a more natural order of the centers of gravity."

"And what advantage would this puppet have over living dancers?" I wondered.

"What advantage? First of all—a negative one, my dear friend, that is, that it would never be affected. For affection, as you know, appears when the soul (*vis motrix*) finds itself at a point other than that of the center of gravity of the movement. Since the puppeteer, as a matter of fact, when he holds this wire, holds no other point in his power but this one, all other limbs are what they should be, dead; they are only pendula that follow the pure law of gravitation; an excellent quality, which we seek in vain with most dancers. Just look at that woman dancer P.," he continued, "when she plays Daphne, and, pursued by Apollo, turns around to look at him; her soul is seated in the vertebrae of her loins; she bends as if she were to break, like a naiad from the school of Bernini. Look at young F. when, as Paris, he stands among the three goddesses and hands the

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apple to Venus: his soul—it is awful to look at—is seated in his elbow. Such mistakes," he added, interrupting himself, "are unavoidable, since we have eaten of the tree of knowledge. But Paradise is bolted, and the cherub is behind us; we must make a voyage around the earth and see if, perhaps, it is open again at the back."

I laughed. Obviously, I thought, the spirit cannot err, when there is no spirit. But I remarked that he had still other things on his mind, and begged him to go on.

"In addition," he said, "these puppets have the advantage of being immune to the force of gravity. They know nothing of the inertia of matter, that quality which is the most antipodal to the dance, because the force which raises them into the air is greater than the one that keeps them enchained to the earth. What would our good G. not give, if she were sixty pounds lighter, or a weight of this size came to her aid in her pirouettes? The puppets need only the ground, like elves, to touch it and revivify the soaring of the limbs and to recover from the effort of the dance; a moment which obviously is not itself a dance, and with which nothing further can be done than to make it vanish, if possible."

I said that, albeit he handled his paradoxes cleverly, he would never make me believe that in a mechanical puppet there could be more grace than in the structure of the human body.

He replied that it would be practically impossible for man to attain even approximately to mechanical being; only a God could measure himself with matter in this field, and here is the point where both ends of the circular world meet and join each other.

I grew more and more astonished and did not know what to say to such strange assertions.

Apparently, he said, while taking a bit of snuff, I had not read the third chapter of the Book of Moses very attentively: and whoever did not know that primary period of human culture, could not really discuss the following and, even less, the ultimate things.

I told him I was very well aware what disorders in the natural harmony of men were created by consciousness. A young man of my acquaintance, I said, had as it were, lost his innocence before my very eyes, and had never afterwards recovered it, in spite of all kinds of imaginable efforts. "But," I added, "what consequences can you draw from that?"

He asked me what type of incident I had in mind? About three years ago, I said, I was swimming in the company of a young man, about whose culture there were marvelous stories in those days. He may have been about sixteen years old, and only from very far away

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could one notice the first traces of vanity, a fact produced by the favor of women. It so happened that only a short time before, in Paris, he and I had seen the statue of the youth pulling a splinter from his foot; the cast of that statue is well known and can be seen in most German collections. He was reminded of it, when he looked into the big mirror, while putting his foot on the footstool in order to dry it after the bath; he smiled and told me what a discovery he had made. Indeed, I, too, had made the same observation at that moment; but, whether it was that I wanted to examine the certainty of his taste for harmony, or whether I wanted to challenge his vanity, I laughed and replied that he was probably seeing things. He blushed and lifted his foot a second time to show it to me: but the attempt failed, as one could easily have foreseen. Confused, he lifted his foot a third, a fourth, even a tenth time: in vain, he was unable to repeat the same movement. What am I saying? The movements he made had such comical features that I could hardly refrain from laughing. From that day on, almost from the moment on, an inexplicable transformation took place in him. He began to stand in front of the mirror all day long, and one charm after another fell from him. An invisible and inexplicable power seemed to throw itself, like an iron net, around the free play of his gestures, and after a year, there was no longer any trace of charm to be discovered in him, that charm that had so delighted the eyes of those around him. Even now, there is still one person alive who witnessed that strange and unhappy incident, and who could confirm it word for word as I have told it to you.

"In this connection," Mr. C. said, kindly, "I must tell you another story which, you will easily understand, also belongs here. I happened to be traveling in Russia and found myself on the country estate of Mr. von G., a Livonian nobleman, whose sons were then busily practicing the art of fencing. The eldest, especially, who had just returned from a university, regarded himself as a virtuoso, and one morning, in his room he offered me a foil. We fought, but it happened that I was superior to him. Passion added to his confusion. Almost every blow I struck was successful and his rapier finally flew into a corner. Half jestingly, half sensitively, he said, while picking it up, that he had found his master; but everything in this world found its own, in turn, and he proposed to lead me to my master. The brothers laughed out loud and cried: Let's go! Let's go down into the wood shed! And they took me by the hand and led me to a bear which Mr. von G., their father, was having educated on his place. When I stepped in front of him, to

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my amazement I saw the bear standing on his hind legs, leaning with his back on a stake, to which he was chained, his right paw lifted up, ready for anything. He looked me in the eye. That was his fencing position. I did not know whether I was dreaming when I saw myself opposite such an adversary; but—'Strike! strike!' said Mr. von G., 'and try, if you can, to do something to him.' Having recovered a bit from my amazement I went at him; the bear made a very slight movement with his paw and parried the blow. I tried to tempt him with feints; the bear did not stir. Once more I went at him with an immediate skill; I would have struck the chest of a man, without any doubt; the bear made a brief movement and parried the blow. Now I was almost in the position of young Mr. von G. The gravity of the bear's manner reduced my self-assurance. Blows and feints followed each other, I was dripping with perspiration. In vain. Not only did the bear, like the best fencer in the world, parry all my blows; but—and here was a thing no fencer would be able to follow—he did not even seem to notice the feints: eye to eye, as if he could read my soul, he stood there, his paw ready for anything, and whenever my blows were not meant seriously, he simply did not move. Do you believe this story?"

"Perfectly," I cried, with joyous applause, "I would believe it from any stranger, more than probably; how much more from you!"

"Now, my excellent friend," said Mr. C., "now you are in possession of everything necessary to understand me. We see that in the degree in which reflection becomes darker and feebler in the organic world, grace emerges all the more shining and dominating. But just as the intersection of two lines from the same side of a point, after passing through the infinite, finds itself suddenly again on the other side; or, as the image of the concave mirror, after having gone off into the infinite, suddenly stands right before us again, so grace returns again after knowledge, as it were, has gone through the world of the infinite, in that it appears best in that human bodily structure which has no consciousness at all, or has an infinite consciousness—that is, in the mechanical puppet, or in the God."

"Therefore," I said, somewhat confused, "we would have to eat again of the tree of knowledge to fall back into the state of innocence?"

"To be sure," he replied. "That's the last chapter of the history of the world."

(*Translated by Eugene Jolas and reprinted from his anthology* Vertical, *published by the Gotham Book Mart in 1941.*)

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Books

LOWELL, THOMAS, &C.*

In some very serious sense there is no competition either on Parnassus or on the hard way up there. Darley, that is, with *Nepenthe* and a lyric or so, is as good as Keats. Mr. Ransom was probably wrong both in theory and practice when he concluded an unfriendly study of *The Waste Land,* many years ago, with the remark that there was not room in the pantheon for both Wordsworth and Mr. Eliot and he thought the prior occupant of the seat would dispute it stoutly; a position, no doubt abandoned since, which I recall to illustrate what can never receive illustration enough, namely the difficulty and uncertainty of contemporary judgment. But there is another sense in which it is sometimes worth saying that work like Keats's demonstrates that work like Darley's doesn't even exist. You can find in Keats everything you can find in Darley, and you find it with transfigured power, and you find many other things as well. Whatever the devotion of a lesser poet, it may be put as the difference between the *occasional* and the *thematic,* between the making of a few fine poems and the conversion of a whole body of material. If the first is impressive, the second is oppressive as well, troubling, overwhelming. Now Robert Lowell seems to me not only the most powerful poet who has appeared in England or America for some years, master of a freedom in the Catholic subject without peer since Hopkins, but also, in the terms of this distinction, a thematic poet. His work displays, in high degrees, passion, vista, burden. He looks

> *Beyond Charles River to the Acheron*
> *Where the wide waters and their voyager are one*

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* Lord Weary's Castle. *By Robert Lowell. Harcourt, Brace.* $2.50.
The Selected Writings of Dylan Thomas. *New Directions.* $3.50.
Young Cherry Trees Secured Against Hares. *By André Breton. View Editions.* $3.75.
Secret Country. *By Jorge Carrera Andrade. Macmillan.* $2.50.
The Flowering of the Rod. *By H. D. Oxford.* $2.00.
The Earth-Bound. *By Janet Lewis. Wells College Press.* $4.50.
Selected Poems. *By Kenneth Patchen. New Directions.* $1.50.
Transfigured Night. *By Byron Vazakas. Macmillan.* $2.00.

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and when he addresses his Maker there is no device, the verse wheels and enlarges, the man really sounds like a prophet,

> *Lord, from the lust and dust thy will destroys*
> *Raise an unblemished Adam, who will see*
> *The limbs of the tormented chestnut tree*
> *Tingle, and hear the March-winds lift and cry:*
> *"The Lord of Hosts will overshadow us."*

Without first-rate qualities ambition is nothing, a personal disease; but given these qualities, the difference is partly one of ambition. Hardy for instance had little (he says that all he wanted was to place one or two lyrics in some good anthology), and notwithstanding a long and reverent love for Hardy I think Mr. Eliot was right when he observed on the occasion of Yeats's seventieth birthday that Hardy now appeared, what he always was, a minor poet. There is much human development over the sixty years between *Hap* and *He resolves to say no more,* but little poetic development, nothing comparable to what Mr. Lowell has achieved in the two years between his first book and *Lord Weary's Castle.* I should say from the poems that this author's ambition is limitless. Whether he has yet written poems as good as Hardy's best this is no moment for judging, though I think the question will one day come up. What is clear just now is that we have before us a genuine, formidable, various, and active poet; as to which character I put in evidence *The Drunken Fisherman, The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket, The Exile's Return, At the Indian Killer's Grave, After the Surprising Conversions,* and parts of a dozen other poems.

Readers of the new book will find it very different from *Land of Unlikeness,* though it brings over ten poems from that book, heavily rewritten as a rule. The earlier poems writhed crunched spat against Satan, War, modern Boston, the Redcoats, Babel, Leviathan, Babylon, Sodom. The style was bold, coarse, surexcited, so close in some respects to its models—the Jacobean lyrists, early Milton (as Mr. Jarrell pointed out in a perceptive review), Allen Tate as a Roman and polemic writer, Yeats as a dynastic—that it was surprising that one had nevertheless a stormed impression of originality. Lowell avoided by instinct the chief religious influences that might have crushed him, Hopkins and Eliot, as well as the influence (Auden) that has strait-jacketed much talent among men just older than himself; but he began like Eliot and Auden with satire—as most ambitious writers in a society like ours apparently must do. Despite some continuing violence of style, however, and the persistence of sardonic detail, the general effect of *Lord Weary's Castle* is not satirical. It is dramatic, moral, elegiac; and the escape from satire represents a triumph for a talent not essentially satirical. Not only is there

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nothing here like the tosspot *Christ for Sale,* but the whole uncontrolled ferocity of poems like it has disappeared. The best new poems, in so far as they reflect the same interests, develop less from that tone than from the trumpet and the sigh simultaneous in the extraordinary distich quoted in PARTISAN REVIEW by Mr. Jarrell:

> *When the ruined farmer knocked out Abel's brains,*
> *Our Father laid great cities on his soul. . . .*

I give the lines again because, though the poem they began has been discerningly scrapped, they announce a major theme. Such a writer's symbols are worth examination. I propose that we take seriously both the title and the illustration on the title page, of Cain's second crime (the murder and flight), and see what they come to. The precise cause of Cain's ruin has been lost, but the cause of Lord Weary's—the title comes from the ballad of *Lamkin*—is known: when his castle was finished he refused payment to his mason Lamkin and sailed away, whereupon Lamkin, helped by the false nurse, broke into the castle and destroyed his wife and babe. Lord Weary's castle is a house of ingratitude, failure of obligation, crime and punishment. Possibly Cain did not bring *enough* of his first-fruits, or brought them grudgingly; "I canna pay you, Lamkin, / Unless I sell my land," which he will not do. Later as the stabbed babe cries in death, Lamkin calls up to its mother, "He winna still, lady, / For a' his father's land"; and the wandering blood of Cain cannot repent. Besides frequent references to Cain, the stories may be deliberately juxtaposed in a sonnet based on Rilke's *Lezster Abend* ("Wearily by the broken altar, Abel" etc.; though *wearily* is taken from MacIntyre's translation, which other details of the poem repeat, it must have been retained for a reason). But of course the myths are suggestive not symmetrical. Thus Cain's guilt rings through the war poems; the nurse is Eve who, letting in the Devil, brought vengeance on Adam; but Lamkin, sometimes the Serpent who murdered innocence (at the ballad's end he and the nurse are executed), mainly is the Lord who enters with sharp sword the faithless house He built.

Therefore most of the thematic poems occur in Hell or ante-hell, the world "that spreads in pain," the rich house we use without paying for; which the defrauded One will enter suddenly. Already with the Capitalist of an early poem, here revised into *Christmas Eve Under Hooker's Statue,* Mr. Lowell had begun to imagine characters moving about in it, but for the most part in the first book he simply abused it. By a shift toward the dramatic which is one of the large features of his development, he is now peopling it. (It is to be noted that Lowell is an *objective* poet; except as a Christian or a descendant he scarcely appears in his poems.) The most elaborate example is a dramatic sequence *Between*

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the Porch and the Altar, at the end of which, with astonishing style, he damns the mother-fixed adulterous drunken protagonist,

> *the Day*
> *Breaks with its lightning on the man of clay,*
> Dies amara valde. *Here the Lord*
> *Is Lucifer in harness: hand on sword,*
> *He watches me for Mother, and will turn*
> *The bier and baby-carriage where I burn.*

The Lord has often this aspect in these poems. If reproached with it, the poet might reply in the words of the Katherine of this poem. "The winter sun is pleasant, and it warms / My heart with love for others, but the swarms/Of penitents have dwindled"; or say that he had taken John Davidson's impressive advice, "Enlarge your Hell; preserve it in repair;/Only a splendid Hell keeps Heaven fair." Still one wonders whether he would have allowed the piercing, nonformulary salvation imagined by the Balzac of *Christ in Flanders,* and one is surprised that, with two poems based on writings by the prodigious Edwards, he passed over *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.*

But the poems are rich with nonformulary life, and Mr. Lowell has other religious tones also.

> *John, Matthew, Luke and Mark,*
> *Gospel me to the Garden, let me come*
> *Where Mary twists the warlock with her flowers—*
> *Her soul a bridal chamber fresh with flowers*
> *And her whole body an ecstatic womb*
> *As through the trellis peers the sudden Bridegroom.*

He is weakest on the whole when near a substance-model, he seems to rely on the model as well as on himself, and his evergreen ingenuity gets too free play; yet even the poems with immediate sources show, together with their defects, qualities thoroughly rare and valuable. (About a third of the new poems have direct literary or historical sources, transformed under his imagination.) His *Ghost,* based on a beautiful elegy of Propertius (iv. 7) not touched by Pound, is not by some distance as fresh delicate firm as Pound's *Homage* but it will stand the comparison without looking idiotic—a sufficient compliment. Lowell is as individual; less energetic with more appearance of energy (that is, higher keyed—*beat,* to take an amusing detail, rendering equally *effugit* and *pelle*); more original in the respect that he is indifferent where Propertius is magnificent, best where nothing remarkable is happening in the Latin or he is inventing; more faithful, only transposing lines 49 ff. and 73 ff.; less flexible; much less witty; as capable as Pound of a dense memorable

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detail, "At cock-crow Charon checks us in his log." Some of these poems are "imitations" in the eighteenth-century sense, and despite their heightened tone should perhaps be judged by a special standard. More independent is the second Edwards piece, *After the Surprising Conversions,* which is written in that phoenix metre, heroic couplet, the best run-on couplets I have seen in a long time:

> *In the latter part of May*
> *He cut his throat. And though the coroner*
> *Judged him delirious, soon a noisome stir*
> *Palsied the village. At Jehovah's nod*
> *Satan seemed more let loose amongst us: God*
> *Abandoned us to Satan. . . . / We were undone.*
> *The breath of God had carried out a planned*
> *And sensible withdrawal from this land.*

Set the simplicity and manliness of this poem beside the mysterious frenzy of *The Drunken Fisherman* or the drenched magnificence of *The Quaker Graveyard,* and you will observe a talent whose ceiling is invisible.

But I don't wish to make a noise about Lowell, reviewers in other channels being equipped for this, and popularity in the modern American culture having proved for other authors not yet physically dead a blessing decidedly sinister. One certainly wants to see fine poems honored and read; and "I say it deliberately and before God," Hopkins wrote to Bridges, "that fame, the being known, though in itself one of the most dangerous things to man, is nevertheless the true and appointed air, element, and setting of genius and its works." The secular dangers are to candor and development, perhaps to fellow-feeling, considering the kind of honor a comics-culture can confer; self-consciousness is the general reef. Luckily Lowell is so intense tough unreasonable that he will probably be safe. I will only make an historical remark. The author of a very interesting leading article recently in *The Times Literary Supplement,* taking *The Orators* as the key book of the thirties, mentions in his conclusion the fact that writers of the period, young and old, "preferred to precision of design and execution an approximate; a general feeling arose that careful finish was in some way base . . . the brilliant improvisation became a standard instead of an adventure." This is so just, as scarcely to need illustration; you can see it best, after Auden's early books, in the beautiful work done by Delmore Schwartz at the decade's end in America—to name one line of corroboration, Mr. Blackmur hung his review of *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* on the word "improvised." Of course Auden himself reacted at once (even in *Look Stranger* regular forms predominate), as Eliot's 1920 volume, under the influence of Gautier, reacted against *Prufrock;* and there have not been wanting other

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signs. But Mr. Lowell's poetry is the most decisive testimony we have had, I think, of a new period, returning to the deliberate and the formal. In other respects, it is true, the break is incomplete. Our best work is still difficult, allusive, and more or less didactic in intention.

A few technical notes. Lowell uses very heavy rime, and thud-metre, spondaic substitution being much commoner than any other; these characteristics alone permit him to indulge frequently and not cripplingly in the hard short run-over that generally marks bad poets. He stops as a rule after the first, the seventh, or the ninth syllable. For instance, *each but one* of the nine lines quoted above from *Between the Porch and the Altar* shows caesura after the seventh syllable (the first begins "and the day"). Perhaps only a master could keep in so narrow an area and make it interesting, but the mastery is as yet certainly very limited. Poets half his size are much more resourceful by way of movement. His ear is not infallible, and this may have something to do with refrain-weakness; though repetition, a considerable element in his designs, he handles admirably (see a fine passage on p. 10). What we might call simultaneous repetition-with-variation, or the serious pun, he abounds in, and the examples sometimes sound better than they are. Thus search-guns "nick the slate roofs on the Holsterwall / Where torn-up tilestones crown the victor"; here *crown* is effective, if it is, against the implausibility of one meaning (invest, reward) and the infrequency of the other (fall on, finish off): one leg ought to be firmer. The same wish to crowd meaning is responsible for a good many of the slurred references of which Mr. Jarrell complained in the earlier poems, and these continue, now and then confusingly. Direct echoes are rare; "Fear with its fingered stop-watch" remembers Auden's "Fear gave his watch no look,"—a later "Fear, / The yellow chirper, beaks its cage" is original and good. Considering the complication of his tradition, the book is notably fresh and consistent. Sonnets, for whatever reasons, tend to be inferior to other forms. The chief danger for a writer so dense is obviously turgidity, and in the sonnets it is least successfully avoided. Whether Lowell owes anything to a poet similarly "packed," Dylan Thomas, it is not easy to say, and so he cannot owe much; there is some common ground in diction for movement (lurch, blunder, lumber, sidle, heave, etc.) and an illimitable barrier in religious attitudes; like Thomas' early similarities to Hart Crane, whom he had not read, I set down to temperament and tradition such resemblance as there is. Finally, despite a good deal of international reference, perhaps inevitable now in the work of a sophisticated poet, and despite some objection I feel to the very obscure word "American," used chiefly as it is by canters and radio announcers, nevertheless it seems worth while saying that Lowell's poetry is deeply a local product.

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The demand for anthologies is so ferocious at present, or publishers think it is—the truth is that we are passing through a deadly and vacant period, with an absence of good new manuscripts to print—that when no general anthology is available for the presses, they anthologize a single man. Dylan Thomas' new book is a selection by the publisher: a few poems from his first two English books (weirdly omitting *Light breaks where no sun shines, The hand that signed the paper felled a city, I have longed to move away,* etc.), many from *The Map of Love* and the new *Deaths and Entrances,* some prose; it overlaps both his earlier New Directions books and, like all the volumes reviewed here, costs too much. But Thomas is one of the three best poets writing in England and anyone who pretends to interest in these matters will need both his book and Lowell's. I tried to describe his verse some years ago (*Kenyon Review,* Autumn 1940) and want at present to make only one or two points.

About his development. Any poet *may* turn out an opsimath like Yeats, it happens at least once a century, but in general it should be possible for a critic to say with confidence from a poet's first good book what sort of development, if any, is to be expected thereafter. By development we mean a movement from one kind of thing to another (getting better at the same thing is called improvement). The law is this: poets, even fine ones, do not develop. Then you have the exceptions. Thomas began very young at a high level. What made it improbable that he would move from the kind of poem he was writing to another kind is that he was incapable of handling a subject without dissolving it into his own obsessions and imagery until the subject disappeared. He is still more or less incapable of this . Instead of comparing him to Shakespeare and cooing over his development, his English admirers should thank heaven and his character that he has continued to write *extremely well,* without undue self-imitation, and with a mildly expanding range of subject. Some of his finest poems are recent, for example *Holy Spring.* A poem like *Among Those Killed in the Dawn Raid Was a Man Aged One Hundred,* cited as an instance of his new particularity, becomes at once in fact a Thomas dream.

This poem is full of locks and keys. John L. Sweeney, in an interesting preface to this book, speaks of "regeneration." The concept is not clear to me, but something similar is clear: that Thomas' poems are about *breaking loose.* There is a *lock* (and a congeries of related symbols for repression). Infrequently a *key* is available, but on the whole one has to *break* the lock (congeries of expressions for these also). This action takes place at dawn, the poems are full of *waking.* Difficulty after difficulty disappears once this theme is grasped. A spiritual movement forward, sometimes represented as flight, toward *light* or freedom. The intensity and freshness of Thomas' variations on the theme are a continuing source of delight.

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Thomas has been called, not plausibly, a surrealist, and surrealism has affected the detail of some of Carrera Andrade's poems. But André Breton is an exclusive and dogmatic surrealist, that is, an *idiot.* I intend nothing invidious, merely that on principle he still sends his mind next door whenever he sits down to work. His new book, according to the irresistible jacket, is in "the classic tradition of the Surrealists . . . morally steadfast," and shows I think his usual modesty and resource:

My wife with the sex of a mining-placer and of a platypus
My wife with a sex of seaweed and ancient sweetmeat

It is true that the glory of the French is lacking in this translation I quote (and *chacun à son fout*); but French or English this helplessly recalls the worst poet not contemporary I ever read, poor Thomas Purney, Newgate's chaplain, the baby-talk pastoralist, whom a heartless scholar once tried to revive:

Why may'nt we Men, yquoth the youngling MEY,
And why may'nt we grasp them? Us graspen they!

or

The dabling DEW fell all emong;
Her buding Breasts so fair and young;
Her buding Breasts, that bloomie grew,
Soft shrinked at the dabling DEW.

(These are real quotations from the actual printed books.)

M. Breton has more ability than Purney—the *momie d'ibis* section of *Fata Morgana* is the best thing in his book—but I doubt if he will last two centuries as Purney at least nominally has done. They have more than tastelessness in common.

The worst contribution of literary surrealism, the senseless iteration, Señor Carrera Andrade easily avoids because he has always a subject in hand and can't waste time like a true surrealist. His quiet, graceful, affecting poems were among the most impressive in H. R. Hays's *Twelve Spanish-American Poets,* and the larger selection now published deserves better attention than my semi-Spanish can give it. He is said to be Ecuador's leading poet, and is as good as the late John Peale Bishop's excellent introduction says he is. This book and Breton's are printed in the way foreign poetry should be, original and close translation facing. I wish some well-fed or even hungry publisher would do the same for Corbière, a large and acute selection of Goethe's poems, and other works; Michael Hamburger's Hoelderlin (Nicholson and Watson, 1943) should be reprinted in this country.

H.D.'s *The Flowering of the Rod* is the conclusion of a three-volume poem or poems written in London during the war. Three volumes, but

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H.D. has always been strong on white space, and she uses here the distich-stanza (a form, rarely handled well except by Wallace Stevens, in which you get the most attention for the least effort), so that there is not much of it. There is not much to it either, unless I am greatly mistaken. The reference is Egyptian and vaguely Christian, instead of Greek; there is said to be a story; "it explains symbols of the past / in to-day's imagery" she wrote in the first part, but I doubt if it does. In a poem sequence even 2500 lines long, one feels, a good deal ought to happen. I preferred the second part (*Tribute to the Angels*) to the others. (The English price, printed on the back of my copy, is instructive: 3/6 or 70 cents, against two dollars American.)

The collection of Janet Lewis' poems is more rewarding, though it will disappoint readers who remember *Twelve Poets of the Pacific*. A new tone is tried only in *Country Burial,* unsuccessfully. Her best work is still small and elegiac. It is more real and more skilful than some better-known women's, and not devoid (as some critics think Mr. Winters' theories produce poetry devoid) of emotion—

> *O gone forever, while joy mounts my stair*
> *With staggering feet and high uncertain voice,*
> *I remember your death.*

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But it is so slight that I wonder whether even a stanza as handsome as this one will keep it in memory:

She climbed a farther hill
More fair than show
The meadows here
Into an air more clear,
A light more still.

It might. Poets capable of the hesitation on *show,* as if it were a substantive (and how beautiful the hovering meaning), are not very numerous.

Omnibus reviews lead sometimes, as here, to juxtapositions inexpressibly violent. Kenneth Patchen undoubtedly has, or has had, some talent, and only a man in his right senses would deny that his work is interesting.

The land is darker than the sea, but God
Is darker than the land.
Move your left breast nearer.

When the soldier scrammed
I heard a blond girl weeping her guts out,
Which is more than you did. Or you.

Holy as stars and flowers,
Sadder than Mary, filthy as human war,
I endure the afflictions of the birds.

I think this piece is characteristic in its air (God, sex, weeping, war, the Virgin), its intimacy ("Come here, reader, look in my pocket"), and its vices (incoherence, blasphemy, cant, vagueness, sentimentality, the un-subject and un-form). Yet it moved me deeply as I made it up two minutes ago, and I believe the only things I neglected to put in were Patchen's apocalypticism, his righteous wrath, snow, and his "Brothers." Writing like Mr. Patchen's is usually called self-expression, but I am convinced that this is a mistake. On the contrary: you take your eye off your self (also off the subject if any, the English language, the forms of poetry, the world, and the spirit) in order to fix it solely and ardently upon your reader. Anything goes. It is very easy, frankly, to write this way; all you want is to convince the reader that you are real, the means of course being rhetoric. "There are two ways of falsifying," says Valery: "one by the work of *embellishment,* the other by the effort to *make true.* The latter case is perhaps that which reveals the more acute affectation. It also marks a certain despair of arousing general interest by purely

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literary means." This applies I feel perfectly to Mr. Patchen; though the great critic now dead probably did not anticipate a writer who would illustrate with equal force and at once both kinds of falsification.

The poems of Byron Vazakas are exactly the honest, not very interesting sort of work that one would expect to see introduced by William Carlos Williams, whose hospitality is a credit to the country. He says that they are better collected than single, but I confess that, rereading them all before I looked at the introduction, my feeling was just the opposite. Together they show as clumsy, derivative, and rather flaccid; the similes are vague, the diction is nothing. I liked better than any of them a poem in *Accent* last year, *Liebestod,* which Mr. Vazakas has not reprinted. There is a possibility of something's happening, however, and some life around, which distinguish the book from the other "first books" the editors sent me. These I couldn't welcome and see small point in damning, so I am not printing my notes on them. Not the worst was a Scot, very up-to-date, who now and then gave the show away with a line like

oh, I am lost in vast immensities—

as distinguished from the small immensities or just immensities, or just dull vague period-style, in which the others are lost.

JOHN BERRYMAN

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MELANCHOLY TO THE END

THE WILD FLAG. *By E. B. White. Houghton Mifflin.* $2.

THE NEW YORKER at its best provides the intelligent and cultured college graduate with the most comfortable and least compromising attitude he can assume toward capitalist society without being forced into actual conflict. It rejects the vulgarity and inhumanity of the public world of politics and business and provincial morality, and it sets up in opposition to this a private and pseudo-aristocratic world of good humor, intelligence, and good taste. Its good taste has always been questionable, to be sure, but the vulgarity of the *New Yorker* is at least more subdued and less persistent than the ordinary vulgarity of journalism.

The *New Yorker* has always dealt with experience not by trying to understand it but by prescribing the attitude to be adopted toward it. This makes it possible to feel intelligent without thinking, and it is a way of making everything tolerable, for the assumption of a suitable attitude toward experience can give one the illusion of having dealt with it adequately. The gracelessness of capitalism becomes an entirely external phenomenon, a spectacle that one can observe without being touched—above all, without feeling really threatened. Even one's own incompetence becomes pleasant: to be baffled by a machine or a domestic worker or an idea is the badge of membership in the civilized and humane minority.

The maintenance of this posture demands a delicate balance of insecurity and security; the *New Yorker* can exploit its nervous distaste for modern society only so long as the distaste does not grow into fear. Any strong shock therefore requires a readjustment: this is why the Second World War and the atomic bomb have forced the *New Yorker* to become "serious." But the readjustment does not alter the magazine's function. On the one hand, the "seriousness" of the *New Yorker* is an expression of panic: they never dreamed that the world's inelegance could become so dangerous. On the other hand, it is a substitute for humor, a special technique for handling what is directly threatening, and its function is the same as the function of the humor: to reduce everything to the point where the assumption of a simple attitude will make it tolerable.

The publication of John Hersey's *Hiroshima* was the *New Yorker* equivalent of a desperate attempt to change the course of history, and it is the measure of the *New Yorker's* inadequacy that this effort should have turned out to be simply a journalistic *coup*. The real sensation was the fact that one article was permitted to take up a whole issue of the magazine—what could be more drastic? The article itself, as Mary McCarthy has pointed out, took Hiroshima out of history and politics and made it a familiar and somewhat reassuring picture of disaster.

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But the trouble is not that the *New Yorker* treated Hiroshima like any scene of death and suffering; the trouble is that the *New Yorker* has always treated death and suffering the way it treated Hiroshima.

The Wild Flag is a collection of E. B. White's *New Yorker* editorials about peace and world government. Mr. White has good will and intelligence, and he is trying to live up to his responsibilities as a citizen. Here is a selection of his thoughts:

"If the range of our planes continues to increase, the range of our thoughts will have to increase. . . . "

"We propose that *it shall be the policy of the United States to bring to an end the use of policy.*" (The italics are Mr. White's, indicating that this is an important point.)

"[Democracy] is the line that forms on the right. It is the don't in Don't Shove. . . . It is the feeling of privacy in the voting booths, the feeling of communion in the libraries, the feeling of vitality everywhere. Democracy is the score at the beginning of the ninth. It is an idea which hasn't been disproved yet, a song the words of which have not gone bad. It's the mustard on the hot dog and the cream in the rationed coffee. . . ."

"An arresting fact about warfare is that it is now unpopular with the men who are engaged in it and with the people who are supporting it. . . . And if a thing is unpopular, there is always the amusing possibility that it may not, then, be inevitable."

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". . . we will continue to believe that although a man may have to compromise with Russia he can never compromise with truth."

"There's only one thing you can say for the German war—the men who fought and won it knew, in a general sort of way, what it was all about. . . . Allied soldiers had a hunch that they disliked the idea behind the word *'Heil.'* They preferred the word 'Hi'—it was shorter and cleaner."

"Read the men with the short first names: Walt Whitman, John Donne, Manny Kant, Abe Lincoln, Tom Paine, Al Einstein."

The purpose of this writing is not to say anything about democracy or the nature of the war or the possibility of permanent peace, but only to arouse certain familiar responses in the liberal middle-class reader. Thus the word "amusing" appears in a context where it is totally without meaning, but it is a word associated with the *New Yorker* attitude and by this association it gives a certain modishness to a sentence that has nothing illuminating to say. In the same way, and for the same reason, a department-store advertisement might say: "Come and see our amusing nightgowns." Again, the sentence about the short first names is literal nonsense, but the liberal middle-class reader can recognize at once that the man who wrote it has the right feelings: anti-discrimination, pro-New Deal, anti-State Department, etc. And there is the facetiousness of the "Manny Kant" and "Al Einstein," to keep one from being taken in, even by one's own side. In this humane and yet knowing atmosphere, history and destruction and one's own helplessness become small and simple and somehow peaceful, like life back home on the farm: the *short* first names, the mustard on the hot dog, the *hunch* about the nature of fascism, the simple and clear relationships between the range of our planes and the range of our thoughts, between the little word *"Heil"* and the little word "Hi." History may kill you, it is true, but you have taken the right attitude, you will have been intelligent and humane and suitably melancholy to the end.

ROBERT WARSHOW

TASTE AND HISTORY

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN POETRY, 1900-1940. *By Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska. Harcourt, Brace.* $4.00.

THE FORM of taste that informs this book is a palpable thing, and to describe that form is perhaps as good a way as any of describing the book. The reader, indeed, may imagine taking shape somewhere in the authors' penumbra around its 500 pages what is almost a Model Modern American Poem. Probably that poem would be in a fairly strict traditional form, though it might have its individual nuances of imperfect rhyme or modulated meter. But it should have a metrical brilliance

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that would sound a verbal music to the melodic ear. Its diction might well be clipped and dry, but in any case would be controlled and firm; its tendency would be ironic understatement. Withal the poem should have wit and elegance and charm—lyric grace is perhaps the best summary. As to subject matter, large schemes are dangerous; the Philosophical and Social Muses are sirens. On the whole the theme had best be elegiac; though neither serious comedy nor devotional piety need be excluded by the elegiac strain.

Not unnaturally the authors are most sympathetic to the poets who come closest to this immanent pattern. Gregory's *Shield of Achilles* showed, perhaps most notably, a talent for exhuming minor poets, and his wife's collaboration has not spoiled the old touch. Unquestionably this book contains the most sympathetic recent estimates, perhaps the *only* recent ones, of such poets as Trumbull Stickney, Louise Guiney, and Adelaide Crapsey. I have no doubt the authors' quotations make the best possible case for them, and in the case of Stickney, at any rate, they deftly disengage some remarkably striking lines. The longest single account of the book would restore E. A. Robinson to an eminence from which most recent criticism has allowed him to slip: the only examples of a "mature vitality" in twentieth-century American poetry, the authors say on their last page, are E. A. Robinson, Robert Frost, and T. S. Eliot. If one accepts the pattern, Robinson's elevation is methodically justified.

Indeed the workings of the model seem subtly to modify the description of those poets who do *not* submit very easily to the frame. Wallace Stevens has deceived himself (and others) in his apparent concern for a philosophy of appearance and reality; it is enough to say that he is an appreciator of the comedy of a civilized milieu. Hart Crane's intoxication and his large designs are not forgotten, but the winnowing of his poems collects a note of more restrained elegy. Even Eliot (for whom Tennyson and Herrick become precedents) is oddly metamorphosed into a "man of feeling." The authors recognize his "new sensibility"; but how precisely it differs in technical innovation and embodied feeling from a traditional "firmness of expression" is never very clear.

A touchstone of taste on the whole at least consistently cultivated demands allowance; but it must be said that it makes it difficult for the authors to write a history of American poetry. History is interested in change and development; and here difference tends to be muted by a pattern of conformity. Consistent attention to the development of technique, and to the related concerns of substance and attitude would seem to be the two threads on which a history of poetry needs to be strung. These matters are rarely seen except as the occasional business of individuals. Dramatic setting interferes with a sense of relative values: Edmund Clarence Stedman's gathering of ineffectual poets in 1900 seems

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quite as important as the Imagist manifestoes and their related affirmations in Chicago. There is little sense of the more than personal revolt, both technical and substantial, against the post-Victorian twilight (the authors' quotation marks for the "Poetic Renaissance" of the second decade suggest a doubt that it existed). Certain Imagists' concern with diction is recognized, but their enormous influence among non-Imagists is not. The Imagists, the French Symbolists, and the seventeenth-century metaphysicals are separately noted as acknowledged influences, but the central concern which together, they argue, with uses of symbol and metaphor in poetry disappears in the mixture: the metaphysical influence shrinks to a parade of "bone, blood, and brain." As to the other, while the authors impeccably remark that "questions of morality, religious and social being, and aesthetic responsibility continue to play an increasingly larger part in the evaluation of twentieth-century American poetry," that is not often evident in their own evaluations. For religious devotionalism they have considerable respect, but philosophic arrangements (as we have seen) they distrust. Public speech seems a fashionable and fading joke; the implicit criticism of American society that motivated much of the poetry as well as the material transportation of the expatriates seems to be forgotten in the air of a jaunty extraterritorial binge. It appears only glimmeringly that the elegiac note they delight

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in detecting may have been a social symbol as well. The urgency of the times and its transmutation into the poetic work gets no very clear recognition in *A History of American Poetry.*

The individual trees, as well as the monochrome vision of confident taste, make the wood hard to see. The surface is too busy to model the structure: there are confusions from vital statistics, the atmosphere of literary milieus, anecdote and incidental personality, the history of reputations, remembered alliances and battles. Personalities induce what seem inequitable counterweights of kindness and rigor: the severity to Robert Penn Warren (though understandable in the light of their pattern) seems strained in the balance of the enthusiasm over, say, Louis Untermeyer or Kenneth Fearing. To regard Delmore Schwartz and Kenneth Patchen as poetical twins seems at least odd whatever one thinks of their individual talents. Altogether, to base a history on the appraisal of individual biographies is a hard route to a judicious and coherent critical grasp.

On the whole Mr. and Mrs. Gregory's talents are for intuitive perception of melodic grace and controlled elegance rather than for any detailed analytic explanation. Even their accounts of individual poets seem generally to confront quotation where one might expect analysis. Usually they quote well; maybe a complaining reader confesses his own inability to uncover in the poem a plain point to which he has been conducted. But this method seems, at the least, to shift the burden from writer to reader; and with Eliot, for example, there seems little more traffic with the poetry itself than an assemblage of critical terms and a spate of representative quotation.

Yet these blank spaces are filled, in a way, by what is almost a new critical method, a method that might be called double-man criticism. This consists, in one form, in appraising Jeffers by quoting Arnold on Victor Hugo; or Hart Crane by Saintsbury on Whitman; or Robinson or E. St. V. Millay by James or Hawthorne (respectively) on characters in their fiction. In another it is simple equivalence: Frost is like Horace, Crane is like Faulkner, *Conquistador* is like *Evangeline,* Eliot is like Delacroix (!). The method of parallel is not altogether new, but it has seldom been so systematically pursued. It has its virtues: it leads to lively gambits, and at times to a startling lighting-up of qualities. But such equivalences are metaphors; they stand in virtue only of a partial relationship (as the authors occasionally recognize); and they tempt to a wayward description of the whole. It is, for example, true and useful to pursue an analogy with Lovelace in pointing out that Auden's poetry "exists within the tradition of English lyric verse." But it is not a total account of Auden; and an ingenious equivalence once taken up seems hard to put aside.

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It is the privilege of the literary essayist to illuminate aspects and excite by special emphasis; but the historian seems to owe some sort of obligation to wholeness and connection. In general I should say that parts of this book might make a stimulating if controversial collection of occasional essays; but together they make an odd history. The danger is that the academic simplicity of its title (in which, as far as I know, it has no rival) will make it read by the wrong people. It should be read by those who are experienced enough in its subject to use it where it is useful and contest it where it is not; I am afraid that it will be read by those who will take it for an unwavering guide.

ANDREWS WANNING

EUROPE'S NIGHT

THE LONG DUSK. *By Victor Serge. Dial Press.* $2.75.

VICTOR SERGE bears a remarkable past: a revolutionist of libertarian inclinations, who has fought in numerous revolts, been a member of the Executive of the Communist International in its heroic period and then worked with the Trotskyists for a while, he is one of the few still responsive survivors of a destroyed generation. Despite the cumulative series of defeats, which often threatened his very existence, he has retained his socialist convictions, always tempered by a warming humanism and a vital sense of personal value. Though he has written much, neither his political work nor his novels are as significant as the man himself.

His writing has suffered from an indiscriminate seasoning of the very qualities which give him personal stature but which also produces a certain kind of loose journalism: the impressionistic memoir, the nostalgic reminiscence, the ready overflow of indignation. These blights of modern journalism frequently make Serge's political writing "soft" and bereft of analytical closeness, though at times lending it a touching warmth; they also corrode the discipline so necessary for the novelist whose talent is not of the highest order. Serge's fiction is accordingly susceptible to the leavening influence of undifferentiated observation and to the vague rhetoric one associates with the "romantic" mind. For Serge is essentially a romantic for whom the revolution is above all a human adventure; and perhaps the difficulty in bridging the gap between the outlook of his generation and ours—to whom Serge's simple idealism seems a little naïve—accounts for the difficulties felt while reading his novel.

The Long Dusk is an attempt to find values connective with the past and relevant to the present. Its subject—the fall of France and the disintegration of European socialism—is depressing enough, but not

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nearly so much as its communication of the spiritual weariness, the waning imaginative power of a nation, a civilization at the end of its historic role—from which Serge and his novel, as all the rest of us, are not exempt. The book becomes a typical expression of an age gone by and a generation destroyed, and as such has inevitable pathos and even some nobility, whatever dissatisfaction it may arouse when considered as a novel.

One suspects that the experiences which Serge seeks to order in his novel are still too recent and chaotic, still too traumatic to our sensibility to admit of successful use in a novel. Too much has been seen and heard; too much endured and suffered; the eyes which saw are weary and the people who suffered are drained; and the books which have come from them are largely uncontrolled responses to events unassimilated by the generations which fell victim. For a novel demands a thoroughly felt-out and densely developed structure of the imagination—one which is unique rather than merely representational. Serge's novel, however, is the product of a political *will,* the need to respond to a social cataclysm by graphic representation; but graphic representation is central not to fiction but to journalism. And that is why one feels while reading *The Long Dusk* that the materials, the potential characters, the necessary attitudes which one would wish in a novel of the recent European events, are present; but the imaginative integration and the time-granted historical perspective to give these elements fictional status are not.

Politically, the novel is in the tradition of Jacobin *Schwärmerei,* the indiscriminate camaraderie which gripped France for a few moments after Paris fell. The lyrical sense of fatality which pervades the novel is not dispelled by the revolutionary optimism of its central character, Ardatov, a Russian exile for whom, by way of compensation, the revolution has become a sort of timeless poetry without intimate relationship to suffering men. This heavy atmosphere of finality makes uninfectious the revolutionary fervor which Serge occasionally tries to summon, even if we are most eager to succumb to it. One's strongest reactions are evoked by an excellent and terrifying portrait of a GPU agent, which indicates the extent to which totalitarian automatism has gripped modern politics.

It is doubtful if any but the very greatest creative imagination could successfully integrate the materials Serge has seized. And that Serge is not, of course. Yet, even when one feels the perception of the novel to be stale and its organization by the imagination to be wanting, one responds sympathetically. That a man like Serge should even wish to express himself in a novel seems cause for gratitude. It is an indication that he, unlike so many of the now sharply dichotomized political activists and literary intellectuals, does not assent to the divorce of political life from literature and its practice. Nor can the inadequacies of the novel be

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found in any gross violation of the writer's craft—there is none of the debasing illicit excitement which a Koestler can summon at the drop of a phrase. Where the novel is inadequate it is because Serge has tried prematurely to do what only a really first-rate novelist, a novelist to the calling born, could do; for which, in our times, there is more cause for praise than censure. Others will write better novels on these themes, but to few will we respond as warmly.

IRVING HOWE

STILL LIFE

THE MEMORIAL: PORTRAIT OF A FAMILY. *By Christopher Isherwood. New Directions.* $2.75.

NEW DIRECTIONS has done Christopher Isherwood, and his readers, no service by failing to indicate that *The Memorial,* which was published in England in 1932, is not—as at least one deceived reviewer has assumed—his "latest production." Though marked by much of the same wit and tenderness of manner, this novel does not have the stature of *Goodbye to Berlin* and the recent *Prater Violet.*

The Memorial is about a number of basically disparate, uncom-

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municating people, members of an English upper middle-class family in the decade following the first World War. Isherwood himself describes it (in his autobiographical *Lions and Shadows*) as "an epic in an album of snapshots." The structure is episodic and chronologically disarranged, the four parts being timed: 1928, 1921, 1925, and 1929. The narrative point of view shifts frequently, and each character is seen both from inside and from several different angles outside.

The book is a "memorial" to its own characters. All that they feel in common is a vague anxiety and confusion, which is in each of them somehow a product of the war. And the wandering, dislocated form of the novel successfully mirrors this feeling.

But in a deeper sense *The Memorial* fails to commemorate. For while it is nervously moving about, objectifying in its motion the psychic predicament of its characters, it is at the same time slighting them of full reality in their situation by its impatient, fragmentary treatment of them. Edward, the aging, vacillating homosexual, is the most completely presented of them all, yet even he emerges with some parts missing, as if pieced together out of scraps found, long afterward, in a wastepaper basket. When he tries unsuccessfully to shoot himself the scene is sharply felt, but not because we know Edward and are involved in his pain and anger at having "mucked it"; rather it is because the action itself, the irony of the misdirected bullet, has a (quite impersonal) power, and a kind of terror, of its own.

The insubstantiality of these characters demonstrates the need for a steadfast, that is, a reinforcing relation to them on the part of their creator. Perhaps what we miss in *The Memorial,* after all, is a "Christopher Isherwood." Without the defining but at the same time *participating* sensibility, the "I" that informs and binds together the later works, the figures in this "album of snapshots" seem unidentified—lost not only from each other but from us. And without a Christopher to ask (as in the moving coda to *Prater Violet*) as much of himself as of them—Who are you? "What makes you go on living?"—how are we ever to find them or name them?

CATHARINE CARVER

BOOKS RECEIVED

Alain-Fournier, THE WANDERER. New Directions, $1.50.
ART NEWS ANNUAL, 1946-47. Crown, $2.50.
Arturo Barea, THE FORGING OF A REBEL. Reynal & Hitchcock, $5.00.
Peggy Bennett, THE VARMINTS. Knopf. $2.50.
Mildred Louise Boie, BETTER THAN LAUGHTER. University of Minnesota, $1.50.
Kay Boyle, THIRTY STORIES. Simon & Schuster, $3.50.

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Robert Bretall, ed., A KIERKEGAARD ANTHOLOGY. Princeton, $5.00.
Holger Cahill, LOOK SOUTH TO THE POLAR STAR. Harcourt, Brace, $3.00.
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER. Ill. by Alexander Calder. Reynal & Hitchcock, $3.75.
THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF AMBROSE BIERCE. Citadel Press, $4.00.
THE COMPLETE POEMS AND STORIES OF EDGAR ALLAN POE. Knopf, $10.
E. E. Cummings, SANTA CLAUS. Holt, $1.50.
James T. Farrell, WHEN BOYHOOD DREAMS COME TRUE. Vanguard, $2.75.
Martha Foley, ed., BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES OF 1946. Houghton Mifflin, $3.00.
FRANCE LIVES. Crown, $5.00.
Maxim Gorky, ORPHAN PAUL. Boni & Gaer, $2.75.
Harley Granville-Barker, PREFACES TO SHAKESPEARE, Vol. 1. Princeton, $5.00.
George Grosz, A LITTLE YES AND A BIG NO. Dial Press, $6.00.
Edith Henrich, THE QUIET CENTER. Sloane, $2.50.
Granville Hicks, SMALL TOWN. Macmillan, $3.00.
Harriet and Sidney Janis, PICASSO. Doubleday, $7.50.
Matthew Josephson, STENDHAL. Doubleday, $4.00.
Alfred Kazin, ed., THE PORTABLE BLAKE. Viking, $2.00.
Henry A. La Farge, ed., LOST TREASURES OF EUROPE. Pantheon, $5.00.
John Lehmann, ed., POEMS FROM NEW WRITING, 1936-1946. John Lehmann, London, 8s.6d.
Pablo Neruda, RESIDENCE ON EARTH. New Directions, $3.50.
Mervyn Peake, TITUS GROAN. Reynal & Hitchcock, $3.00.
William Peirce Randel, EDWARD EGGLESTON. King's Crown Press, $3.50.
Daniel Catton Rich, HENRI ROUSSEAU. Museum of Modern Art and Simon & Schuster, $2.75.
Curt Sachs, THE COMMONWEALTH OF ART. Norton, $5.00.
A SAINTSBURY MISCELLANY. Oxford, $3.50.
Herbert W. Schneider, A HISTORY OF AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY. Columbia, $4.50.
Robert Schumann, ON MUSIC AND MUSICIANS. Pantheon, $3.75.
Ernest J. Simmons, LEO TOLSTOY. Little, Brown, $5.00.
Edith Sitwell, GREEN SONG. View Editions and Vanguard, $3.00.
Stephen Spender, EUROPEAN WITNESS. Reynal & Hitchcock, $3.00.
Elsa Triolet, THE WHITE CHARGER. Rinehart, $3.00.
Mark Van Doren, THE COUNTRY YEAR. Sloane, $2.75.
Robert Penn Warren, BLACKBERRY WINTER. Cummington Press, $5.00.
Yvor Winters, EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON. New Directions, $2.00.
Barbara Wooton, FREEDOM UNDER PLANNING. University of North Carolina, $2.00.
Francis Brett Young, THE ISLAND. Farrar, Straus, $3.50.

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Variety

"The Truly Monstrous": A Note on Nathanael West

MR. CYRIL CONNOLLY in his essay, "The Novel-Addict's Cupboard," mentions a class of novels "that one feels are little known or underrated, that are never followed by a successor, or whose effect on people is unpredictable and subversive." Among them he lists Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts,* a "defiant masterpiece of futility." Although New Directions has recently re-issued *Miss Lonelyhearts,* it still belongs to the category of "neglected books." A small group of West devotees continues to cherish the novel and the memory of its author, but it has neither been popular among those who enjoy bad novels nor known to enough people who like good ones. Mr. Alfred Kazin does not mention West's name in his study of recent American literature; he can't be located in Fred B. Millett's *Contemporary American Authors.* In preparing this note I have found practically no critical treatment of West save for a handful of reviews, most of them hurried and inadequate. Only one critic, Edmund Wilson, has dealt with West at length (*The Boys in the Back Room*), recognizing his strange and remarkable talent.

When Nathanael West died after an automobile accident in 1940, he was thirty-two years old. Aside from the fact that he was married to Eileen McKenney, lived in Hollywood after 1935, and wrote screen plays (*I Stole a Million, Born to be Wed, Men Against the Sky,* etc.) I have been able to discover only the following information about his life.

He was born Nathan Wallenstein Weinstein. He graduated from Brown University in 1924. The college yearbook described "Pep" at this time as "an easygoing, genial fellow" who introduced his classmates to *Jurgen* and "passed his time in drawing exotic pictures" or "quoting strange and fanciful poetry." I do not know what he did after graduation, but some time during this period he worked as a manager of a residential hotel. His first novel, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (Contact Editions), was published in 1931 and *Miss Lonelyhearts* two years later. *A Cool Million* (Covici-Friede, 1934)—dedicated to his brother-in-law S. J. Perelman, whom he had known at Brown—followed, and his last novel, *The Day of the Locust* (Random House), appeared a year before his death, in 1939.

In August of 1933, during the interval between the publication of

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his first and second novel, West became one of the associate editors of *Americana,* a satirical magazine which the *Nation* aptly characterized as a "symbol and symptom" of the depression. The tone of the magazine can best be illustrated by quoting the conclusion of its opening manifesto: "We are Americans who believe that our civilization exudes a miasmic stench and that we had better prepare to give it a decent but rapid burial. We are the laughing morticians of the present." It featured the drawings of George Grosz (the other associate editor), the burlesques of E. E. Cummings and S. J. Perelman, essays by Gilbert Seldes, M. R. Werner, and Lawrence Dennis, and the work of several brilliant and savage cartoonists. West had nothing to do with the first numbers of *Americana,* and it was discontinued shortly after he had joined the staff, but his connection with it is important. Some of its raucous and Dadaist quality is caught in his subsequent novels, together with its bitterness and cynicism and rage born of breadlines and national skullduggery.

West's earliest work, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell,* excerpts of which appeared later in *Americana,* was a privately printed little exercize that never should have been printed at all. Self-conscious, arty, full of quips and learned allusions and painstakingly shocking, it possesses few of the merits of the other novels, and yet it reveals certain characteristically Westian touches

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that reappear in his later writing. It is savage, iconoclastic, uterine (it begins in the anus of the Wooden Horse and ends with the dreamer's orgasm)—and most typical of all it illustrates West's predilection for the perverse and the grotesque. We meet in these pages the first of the monstrosities who are to be more artistically and credibly presented in the later books. West is obviously experimenting in style and technique as well as subject matter. The book is a composite of satirical rhapsodies, lewdly pedantic speculations, and parodies reminiscent of S. J. Perelman in his less subtle moments. Scatological and pretentiously wise, the book is novel without being original.

Somewhere in *Balso Snell* appears the following reflection:

> An intelligent man finds it easy to laugh at himself, but his laughter is not sincere if it is thorough. If I could be Hamlet, or even a clown with a breaking heart 'neath his jester's motley, the role would be tolerable. But I always find it necessary to burlesque the mystery of feeling at its source; I must laugh at myself, and if the laugh is "bitter," I must laugh at the laugh. The ritual of feeling demands burlesque and, whether the burlesque is successful or not, a laugh. . . .

In *Miss Lonelyhearts* West burlesques "the mystery of feeling at its source." The hero, a newspaper reporter conducting a Beatrix Fairfax column for "Sick-of-it-all," "Desperate," and "Disillusioned-with-tubercular-husband" begins to take seriously what he undertook as a joke. He is inundated with misery, develops a Christ complex (thereby becoming a *grotesque* in the Sherwood Anderson sense) and dies after experiencing the full measure of frustration which West invariably reserves for his bedeviled protagonists. All of Miss L.'s misadventures are carried on in a surrealist atmosphere of newspaper offices, speakeasies, and bedrooms, and we are never permitted to forget the ineffectualness of this neurotic Charlie Chaplin, this two-bit Dostoevsky.

One of the spokesmen for West's Mephistophelian commentary on man's desperation is Miss L.'s boss, Shrike, who first appeared as Beagle Darwin in *Balso Snell*. Shrike, another damned soul, is a grotesque parallel of Mallachi Mulligan or one of Aldous Huxley's articulate cynics, but he stifles his despair with furious humor and destructive rhetoric. It is the satanic Shrike who mockingly holds up the possibilities of escape to Miss L.—the rural life, the South Sea idyll, the cultivation of the senses, art—and then rejects them. No, Shrike concludes, "God alone is our escape. The church is our only hope, the First Church of Christ Dentist, where He is worshipped as Preventer of Decay. The church whose symbol is the trinity new-style: Father, Son, and Wire-haired Fox Terrier. . . . " Robert Cantwell was right when he called *Miss Lonelyhearts* a "modernized, faithless, *Pilgrim's Progress.*"

The world of *Miss Lonelyhearts* is less fantastic than the insides of the Trojan Horse, for West became increasingly objective, but it is still

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an intensely personal world, a wasteland, where, as far as Miss L. could discover, "there were no signs of spring. The decay that covered the surface of matted ground was not the kind which life generates. Last year, he remembered, May had failed to quicken these soiled fields. It had taken all the brutality of July to torture a few green spikes through the exhausted dirt." Here too in New York, "crowds of people moved throughout the street with a dreamlike violence," and "the gray sky looked as if it had been rubbed with a soiled eraser. It held no angels, flaming crosses, olive-bearing doves, wheels within wheels. Only a newspaper struggled in the air like a kite with a broken spine." No fructifying rains relieve the drought, and at the end of the novel, the Fisher King still sits desolate by a dry canal. *Miss Lonelyhearts* must be read against a background of crashing banks, breadlines, and the WPA; it is symptomatic of economic as well as of moral stagnation. George Grosz—if he did not help to inspire it—might have drawn the illustrations.

That West himself was thinking about social portents and latent revolution is made clear in his third novel, *A Cool Million* or *The Dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin,* a kind of inverted mock-heroic *It Can't Happen Here*. The American success code had lost some of its magic by 1934, and the prestige of the businessman, enormously inflated during the twenties, had come down a little with the Market.

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West administered a *coup-de-grâce* to the Alger myth and incidentally wrote the first of the postdepression fictional anticipations of American fascism.

The hero of *A Cool Million,* Lemuel Pitkin, is a modern Phil the Fiddler who follows the advice of Nathan "Shagpoke" Whipple, ex-President, Vermont sage, and future Führer, and is slowly "dismantled" for his pains. Imbued with business folklore and rigidly adhering to the success code, Pitkin successively loses his teeth, eye, leg, and scalp. At the end of the book and prior to becoming a Yankee Horst Wessel for the Leathershirts, he is earning his living as a stooge for a couple of comedians who punctuate their patter by beating him with newspapers: "For a final curtain, they brought out an enormous wooden mallet labeled, 'The Works' and with it completely demolished our hero. His toupee flew off, his eye and teeth popped out, and his wooden leg was knocked into the audience."

A Cool Million, in spite of its heavy facetiousness and sophomoric insolence, seemed mildly funny in 1934; it is not hilarious reading now. At first glance it appears to be a departure from the two previous novels and his last one, and yet the characteristic themes persist. Lemuel the Stooge, like Miss L. gets lost in his quest for certainty, and the plight of his sweetheart, Betty Prail—ravished by an endless procession of men while Lemuel is snatched away by the Third International or languishes in a bear trap—might symbolize the rape of Columbia by resolute hordes of 100 per cent Americans. But West's unpleasantly genial parody is only a weak tour de force which is hardly saved by its serious undertones and occasional insights.

With *The Day of the Locust,* however, we return again to a more significant level of writing. Although it lacks the concentration and focus of *Miss Lonelyhearts*—the stories of Homer Simpson, the Iowa hotel clerk, and Tod Hackett, West's Yale man observer-hero, are not sufficiently fused—it nevertheless shows a detachment, a curious and penetrating discernment that makes it, as Edmund Wilson has said, one of the most satisfying books about Hollywood. The plot is negligible. Tod Hackett finds himself involved with a typical collection of queeries and degenerates: a moronic but disturbing Venus after whom the hero unsuccessfully lusts, her batty ex-comic father, her cowboy paramour, a vindictive and swashbuckling dwarf, and a Sherwood Anderson grotesque named Homer. The author's chief concern, however, is not with the roisterings of these infantile adults but with the *Walpurgisnacht* which is Hollywood.

West's notations on the Hollywood flora and fauna are brilliant enough. He writes amusingly and with an air of wonder about the architecture, dress, and lingo (one character remarks: "How silly, batting an inoffensive ball across something that ought to be used to catch

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fish on account of millions are starving for a bite of herring"). But the tension of the novel comes, as in West's other books, from his recognition of the ineluctable discontent of the masses. In *Miss Lonelyhearts* he lifted up the board to show grubby things writhing in urban darkness; he described a people devoured by personal anguish. *The Day of the Locust* is also a season in hell which erupts at the end with a middle-class riot precipitated by a movie premiere.

West sees in the Hollywood mob a people brutalized by leisure, cheated by phony illusions. And like his painter-hero (later to catch the spirit of this thwarted host of sideline lookers in his canvas, "The Burning of Los Angeles") he dramatizes "the contrast between their drained-out, feeble bodies and their wild, disordered minds." Lured to California by sunlight and orange juice and stupefied by a maddeningly bland climate, these Iowa picnickers are "stirred only by the promise of miracles and then only to violence." They suffer from a cosmic ennui which only lynchings and love-nests can mitigate. "It is hard to laugh at the need for beauty and romance," West observes, "no matter how tasteless, even horrible, the results of that need are. But it is easy to sigh. Few things are sadder than the truly monstrous."

Any moral conclusions about New York or Hollywood or American life in general are never stated explicitly in West's novels, and his

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anger is seldom obvious. He resembles his friend Perelman in this respect or the successful screen writer in *The Day of the Locust*—"a master of the involved comic rhetoric that permitted him to express his moral indignation and still keep his reputation for worldliness and wit." That he had values and standards and a social philosophy is perfectly plain, however, even though he was not a social realist who celebrated brawny proletarians.

The books of West deal with the obsessions and behavior of grotesques, but they are none the less political. They tell us more about the fascist mentality and the coming cataclysm than most class-conscious novels of the thirties, because West was able to feel, as well as to picture in his impressionistic way, the emptiness and ugliness of the times. His books are a kind of feverish preview of the sadistic and irrational forties.

Other novelists among his contemporaries actually gave a more faithful presentation of a country on the skids; West's novels do not begin to approximate the colorful and violent documentations of Dos Passos or the grim tracts of Farrell. But they do give us in an arresting and sometimes poetic way, a glimpse of a mindless people doped by the pulps, the tabloids, and the

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cinema, a people ripe for catastrophe.

West was cut off just at the moment when he seemed to be developing into a novelist of more than ordinary proportions, and it is of course fruitless to speculate about what he might have become had he lived. *Miss Lonelyhearts* will possibly remain a "minor classic," and West may come to rate a footnote in the histories of the academicians. But he will always appeal to readers with a taste for the bizarre, who can respond to his delirious vision and find some meaning in his fantastic realism.

DANIEL AARON

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Thanks are due to the Oxford University Press for permission to publish, in the November-December 1946 issue, William Troy's translation of the Baudelaire review of *Madame Bovary*. The article will be included in a selection of Baudelaire's prose writings, edited and translated by Mr. Troy, which Oxford will publish in the near future.

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A Note on a Genteel Reader

IF MARK SCHORER'S review of *The Partisan Reader* and his remarks about PARTISAN REVIEW (in *The New Republic* of November 11, 1946) were merely an expression of Mr. Schorer's personal feelings, we would not think that what he said required our attention. But the fact is that his attitude is typical of a certain kind of reader. Schorer is but one of many; the type is middlebrow, academic, genteel, interested in modern literature up to a certain point. The point is reached when modern literature becomes too difficult, too serious or extreme, too much involved in a desperate commitment to the conclusions which its experience has made inevitable.

At this point Mr. Harry Levin, an erudite academician who has recently announced that literature is an institution, finds it necessary to recoil from the criticism of modern life in Joyce's *Ulysses* and to declare Joyce a merely verbal master who in using four-letter words was being nothing more than literary. In a like way, Schorer praises certain stories in *The Partisan Reader* because they are "apolitical, even asocial," although every story he praises is social in a way which has political implications, as, for example, the story "America! America!" in which the theme is the failure of a whole group of immigrants to realize the American dream of success, a failure caused by the depression, a catastrophe

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which can hardly seem, even to Schorer, "apolitical, even asocial." Another such story is "The Mohammedans," by H. J. Kaplan, which is surely social and political both in theme and direction.

This praise of social writing as asocial brings us close to the self-indulgent obscurantism of the new brand of literary academician. He prefers not to commit himself politically and he certainly does not like to see writers concern themselves with both literature and politics. Schorer illustrates this obscurantism by speaking of the "shrillness" of the editors, and their self-righteousness, and their "rigid" anti-Stalinism, which he places on the same level with the rigid Stal-

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inism of the *New Masses*. But shrillness is not a political category; and one may be self-righteous and yet right in believing that Stalinism is a totalitarian menace. Moreover, any equation of the anti-Stalinism of PARTISAN REVIEW with the Stalinism of the *New Masses* is so fantastic that one can only believe that it is inspired by a love of paradox and a fear of politics.

Here again we touch upon the genteel reader's innermost feelings: when he dislikes politics, or any political position, he does not make *political* objections to it, but expresses his distaste by speaking of "shrillness" and "churlishness," invoking the canons of gentility as if the most important political issue of our time, totalitarian Communism, were a question of good manners, to be decided, perhaps, by Emily Post. In justice to Schorer, it must be said that he adds the very fancy and now very modish distinction between being "anti-Stalinist" and being a "Stalinophobe." Presumably if one says politely and discreetly, "I do not like Stalinism," then one is anti-Stalinist; if one attacks Stalinism in serious political terms, one is a Stalinophobe. If the distinction has any other real content, it has not yet been announced publicly and Schorer certainly fails to explain what it means.

Shorer also appears to admire certain aspects of PARTISAN REVIEW. It has "year by year, provided us with some of the very best of current writing and with most of the very best living writers." But this admiration is qualified. In presenting the best writing of our time, the editors, Schorer thinks, have somehow violated their own "intellectual bias." This can only mean either that the editors should not have published the best writers of our time or that somehow these writers made their way into the magazine while the editors were not looking. Is it fanciful to suppose that this is the projection of an academic experience, say, in a university where good teaching prevails while the president is looking the other way, making believe that his faculty is not teaching in a fashion that contradicts his own intellectual bias?

Perhaps this is mere fancy. But it is a literal fact that Schorer has sought out a formula for condemning the program and principles of PARTISAN REVIEW while at the same time praising the writings that appear in it. We submit that the contents of PARTISAN REVIEW flow directly from its policy and principles, such as the principle that the value of a literary work cannot be reduced to its ideological allegiances. It would be superfluous to make this obvious point, if Schorer had not brought forward the absurd notion that what is good in the magazine violates our editorial aims, thus turning PARTISAN REVIEW into some kind of weird accident that has now been occurring for more than ten years.

THE EDITORS

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Correspondence

Sirs:

I was particularly interested by the poems in the French issue of PR: this sort of freely moving high lyricism (which is not at all "anti-intellectual" but rather the more philosophical for being more lyrical and flowingly imaginative) does not seem to be very popular among American poets at present. Most of them seem to be constricted and even constipated in their expression, or else one has the feeling that there is so little there that that little has to be carefully meted out (I am not referring to the great ones of the older generation: to Pound, Williams, Stevens, Moore, Cummings, or—I think one should call his bluff and invariably include him among American poets—Eliot). There *are* a few American poets writing in a more freely lyrical manner, but they are seldom published, especially in the larger reviews. Of course, I think the critical reaction of the last ten years or so has had a lot to do with this situation: I mean by critical reactionaries not so much Brooks, MacLeish, or J. Donald Adams (none of whom, I'm sure, have been read by any halfway serious writer with more than amusement, insofar as

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they are regarded as literary critics, though with alarm certainly when they are taken as political symptoms), but rather such men as Winters, Tate, Ransom, and Blackmur (there is a host of small fry swimming in the wake of these), who have resolutely set themselves, to a great extent, against any sort of free-flowing lyricism and have encouraged a certain pseudo-classical and/or–"traditional" rigidity —neither truly classical nor genuinely traditional. I would say without hesitation—despite the obviously great perceptivity and sensitivity of some of these men, and the undoubted services some of them have done us (I am thinking especially of Winters and his recovery and discovery of so many otherwise buried poems, both of the English sixteenth century and of the American twentieth century)—that these critics have had a very bad influence upon American writing, discouraging exploration and experimentalism and encouraging an adherence (disgusting in its timidity) to a very watered-down version of "tradition" indeed. Not that, as Michael Fraenkel once pointed out to me, it is likely that any *first-rate* writer was lastingly affected by them, but that many who would otherwise have been good second or third-rate writers (or rather, to avoid the unpleasant connotations of this "rate" talk, good *minor* writers) have been constricted and choked to unreadability by the pronouncements (backed by God knows what incredible prestige) of these critics.

But—after all!—it's probably wrong to blame the Cult of Sobriety critics as if they were the cause of the bleakness, the lack of warmth, of so much American poetry nowadays. They are symptomatic, as is the poetry itself. It may be reasonable to expect the poets to be a little more alive than most people, even in *this* frozen deadly time (and as a matter of fact many of them *are*—a *little* more alive!—but what a little!) but when a whole world society is frozen, inexpressive, mechanical—and consequently more explosively aggressive, more incredibly destructive than ever before—how can we expect warm living *poetry* or anything else warm and alive, except from the tiniest minority of rebels, the few men and women here and there who still refuse to be bound into strait jackets?

The fact that the French poems one sees nowadays seem to be a little more alive and flowing is probably not so much due to a different critical situation as to the traditionally greater aliveness of the French (not at all illusory, I believe: even in the throes of finance capitalism at its worst the French never froze over like most of the Americans did) and to the rebound from the extreme dangers of the war and the occupation (I think the Existentialists' analysis is quite correct here: being confronted with death, if one doesn't crack from the extreme anxiety one rebounds even more strongly into livingness).

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